# BETWEEN | SPACE

By

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ABSTRACT

BETWEEN | SPACE

By

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We are a practicing Shaman: a religiously traumatized Theopoet who has been called out of religion to journey with religiously traumatized humans who have separated from colonized religions in Amerika. Humans among the Millennial demographic in Amerika, who leave a colonized religion like Christianity often experience unresolved religious trauma and are ostracized by their Christofascist faith communities. This demonstration project will co-create a series of relative, restorative, and revolutionary spaces that creates community for religiously traumatized millennials to begin healing religious trauma; we propose Between | Space.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the collection of cosmic patterns that we embody as easy as breathing and blinking. To the multitude of inner traumatized spaces that inspire me to Love my Self as we navigate off-path into the Unknown. To my ancestors: the plethora of quantitative data interpreted as historical and future experience. A collective trauma and lack has affected us in such a way that we imagined a "Between | Space:" a *True North* community. To my Tribe: thank you for trusting me and allowing me to walk with you. To my advisor, Rafael Reyes III, Ph.D.- you walked with me through dark times, inspired me when we felt all was lost and listened when others couldn't, there are no words my friend. To Christopher, my Shadow: without you, we wouldn't understand the other half of our Self, to include the indescribable trauma we embody. Finally, to my life partner, Yesenia Waldron, who we could have not climbed to such heights without. Thank you for journeying with me and loving your Self in the process.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Setting

In our[1] human attempt to identify and communicate our multi-faith ministerial challenge, we will be using Theopoetics as a methodological framework to articulate religious trauma. As a 21st century Theopoet, we humbly and audaciously offer a Theopoetic expression of our non-traditional multi-faith ministerial setting; found among the religiously traumatized and dehumanized- taking shape in between and among humans existing beyond the practice of a colonized[2] Christianity in Amerika.[3] Our setting exists among religiously traumatized millennials who are between the ages of 26 to 41 in 2022 C.E. (see Figure 1). Among millennials are those who have voluntarily and involuntarily separated from a colonized Christianity[4] in Amerika and are experiencing religious trauma. Our ongoing research suggests that humans among the millennial demographic who are migrating from a colonized Christianity in Amerika are increasing over time (see Figure 5 & 6). When challenged with the rise of religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika, we respond with a Theopoetic expression that resembles those

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[1] My pronouns are *they*, *their* and *them*. We do not identify in the singular first-person pronoun (I), but instead, we identify as a collective third person pronoun (we). Throughout this dissertation, we will use illeism to refer to our Self as *me, us, ours* and *we*.

[2] Colonization is the act of establishing political, physical, spiritual and mental control over another conscious being or a group of conscious beings.

[3] Amerika is spelled with a "K" to emphasize the German etymology of the word that suggest imitation of a Nazi governed country that further implies a fascist nation.

[4] Colonized Christianity: Due to Christianity being in relationship with colonization; it mimics what the other is doing until synergy is created. It's the synergy between Christianity and colonization that creates a Colonized Christianity.

who are and have been religiously traumatized when opposing or not conforming to a colonized Christianity. [5]

**The Copernicans: Religiously Traumatized Millennials**

In 1632 C.E. the late Italian astronomer, physicist and engineer, Galileo Galilei published a book called "Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems." In this book, there is a dialogue between two symbolic characters, *Salviati* and *Simplicio*. *Salviati* Theopoetically symbolized the Copernican heliocentric (Sun-centered) theory of the Universe, while *Simplicio* Theopoetically symbolized the Ptolemaic/Aristotelian geocentric (Earth-centered) theory. This Renaissance period (1400 C.E.-1600 C.E.) was critiqued and understood through a religious understanding of the world and how it works; Europe and its collective countries/territories were conquered and united by a powerfully influential religion known today as Christianity. Europe became a Christian hegemony[6] that fascistly dictated how society was governed and what people believed to be true or sacred during the 16th century. By the end of the 16th century, Christianity gave rise to a historically religious war that lasted 30 years: the *Thirty Years' War* was one of the most destructive wars in European history because between 1618 C.E. to 1648 C.E., almost 8-12 million people died. During this period of time, Galileo audaciously disagreed with the politically powerful colonized Christian Churches views and their

[5] See Chapter Two for a more in-depth Theopoetic analysis.

[6] Susan Arai and B. Dana Kivel, "Critical Race Theory and Social Justice Perspectives on Whiteness, Difference(S) and (Anti)Racism: A Fourth Wave of Race Research in Leisure Studies," *Journal of Leisure Research* 41, no. 4 (December 2009): 459–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2009.11950185. Christian hegemony refers to the normalization of Christian values, beliefs and practices, as well as the positive and privileged platform individuals of Christian faith are afforded through institutional discourse and design.

biblical text that suggested God's design was to have the Earth be the center of the Universe.[7] "Galileo was a man caught between shadow and substance, in that liminal space where the world was changing:"[8] a Between | Space.

In 1633 C.E., Pope Urban VIII (a symbol of leadership in a colonized Christianity) found Galileo *vehemently suspect of heresy* and sentenced him to indefinite house arrest for his perspective of a heliocentric Universe.[9] A modern-day colonized Christianity continues to demonstrate the Ptolemaic view of the Universe regardless of what science, humanism, mysticism and religiously traumatized humans have offered in opposition to a colonized interpretation and preservation of God's inspired words that were written in the Bible: "[God] You set the earth on its foundations so that it shall never be shaken." (Psalm 104:5 NRSV) "The sun rises, and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises." (Ecclesiastes 1:5 NRSV) However, today more and more religiously traumatized millennials Theopoetically view the colonized practices of Christianity as still practicing Ptolemaic views in the 21st century, except in a slightly different way that happens to be religiously traumatizing to many millennials (Copernicans) in Amerika. Instead of upholding an Earth-centered view, colonized Christianity has Theopoetically transitioned to a Church-centered view. Colonized Churches have become the universal focus so much that its practitioners are Theopoetically the exploited Sun as described in

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[7] John Seel, Jr., *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), xvii.

[8] Ibid.

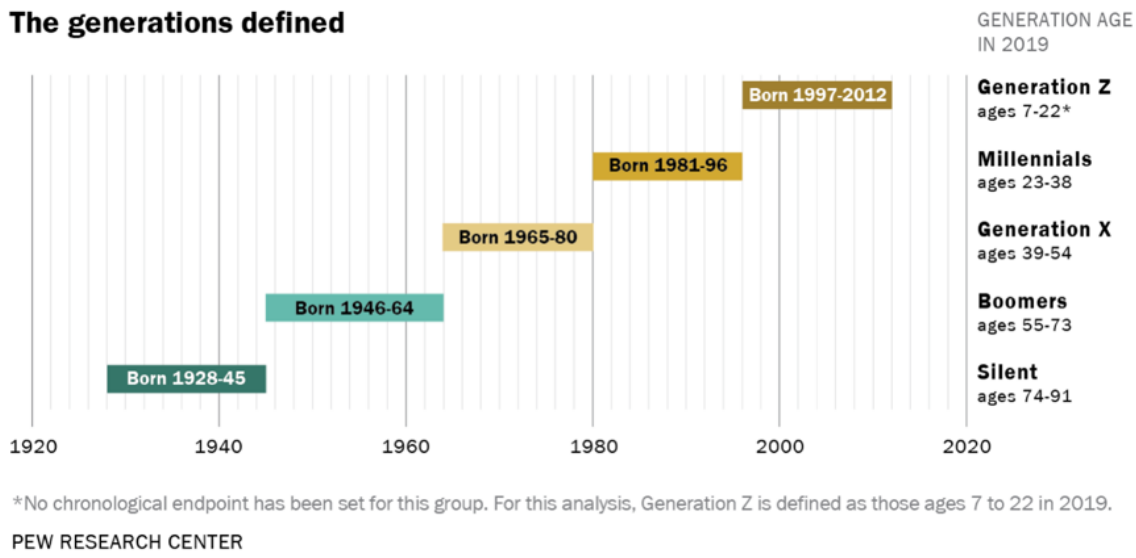
[9] Albert Van Helden, "Galileo - Galileo's Copernicanism," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Galileo-Galilei/Galileos-Copernicanism.

the book of Ecclesiastes 1:5 NRSV; “we are expected to rise and fall and reset daily for [a colonized Church].”

The Universe is expected to continue transforming while a colonized Church remains the same, not relative to or in relationship with humans in a process of Self-development. This implies that a colonized Christianity is perfect, made without error and doesn’t need to change. Millennials experiencing religious trauma can be seen as a relatively new generation of Copernicans emerging and evolving in Amerika, looking for authentic relationships and something indescribably beyond human understanding (God, Creator of all things). David John Seel, Jr. confirms the identity of religiously traumatized millennials as Copernican’s, when he describes them as those who are experiencing and navigating life in a way that is relatively different than their spiritual ancestors and colonized Christianity. This shift in perspective is a Theopoetic example of how to identify the religiously traumatized millennials in our setting. The idea of humans going from a geocentric perspective to a heliocentric perspective of the Universe not only makes them an audacious heretic in the eyes of a colonized Christianity but also traumatically affects how humans make choices, experience their environment, socialize, process emotions, and have a relationship with God.[10]

[10] Ibid.

Figure 1: The Generations Defined (Pew Research Center)




According to the Pew Research Center, "anyone born between 1981 C.E. and 1996 C.E. (ages 26 to 41 in 2022 C.E.) is considered a Millennial"[11] and were conceived towards the end of the last millennium (see Figure 1). They are a byproduct of technological advancements that revolutionized the world as we know it today. Imagine the many parts of life that are affected and or controlled by the internet; millennials were emotionally and physically developing when so many changes were happening in Amerika.[12] Most millennials remember and have been traumatized by the 2001 C.E. organized Terrorist Attacks of 9/11: a series of four coordinated suicide terrorist attacks carried out by a militant Islamic extremist group called *al-Qaeda*.

[11] Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

[12] "Amerika" is an alternative spelling for the country America, intending to portray the country as fascist, oppressive and culturally inferior.

The *September 11th Attacks* uniquely affected millennials (ages 6 to 21 in 2002 C.E.), on a spectrum from childhood trauma to career changes. In 2002 C.E. children in first grade and young adults starting their new careers were living during a time in Amerika when society was being introduced to the first form of internet (web 1.0) and its social networking platforms like "Myspace, Facebook and AOL Instant Messenger." Technologies like Dial-up internet (web 1.0), Bluetooth, the cell phone, or Motorola's iconic two-way messenger changed how humans in the early millennium communicated and interacted with the world around them. Most Millennials (ages 12 to 27 in 2008 C.E.) experienced the economic recession of 2008 C.E. in the U.S.; either the seventh grader's parents or the 27-year-old adult navigating life independently or married (family orientated). Many may have lost their job because of this crisis or were forced to change or study a different career to make a living. This also implies millennials going back to school to study a different career or furthering their degree. This information allows us to see how versatile and traumatized a generation of humans like millennials are before even considering the ones religiously traumatized. The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting embody "openness, the move from dweller to explorer, from someone who presumes to have a corner on truth to one who is continually learning and growing."[13]

In our setting, Theopoetically, the Copernican's (religiously traumatized millennials) are looking for "community and personalized attention [as well as

[13] Seel, Jr., *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church,* 121.

relationship]."[14] They are modern-day Copernicans who often believe that reality is essentially relational. They think and believe, everything is a relationship, or is in a relationship and the "Universe is a verb, a process of ceaseless activity [-everything has a vibration and is moving]."[15] They are looking for authenticity, which is "not a description that you can use for yourself; it is an affirmation given by others [in community]."[16] Finally, the Copernican's who make up our setting have "an innate restlessness stemming from an acute awareness of an existential disconnect between what is and what ought to be."[17] They are Theopoetically modern-day prophets: poetic messengers delivering wisdom and divine information from the deepest depths of the eternal Abyss: God. The religiously traumatized Spirit of Copernican's is asking for mutual authenticity, trust and humility; it isn't interested in absoluteness, arrogance, slavery, or perpetuated lies for the "greater good."

> The measure of leadership is best seen in times of crucial decision. [Religiously traumatized] millennials carry a new [perspective] on reality that poses a major challenge to the Church in the coming years; this new frame is not only different, it is [relatively] better. Like the iceberg warning to the Titanic, it should not be ignored. Through knowledge of this [religiously traumatized perspective] shift and all it entails, Church leaders can learn how to navigate these uncharted waters. First, we turn to examine what often cannot be seen – the importance of [perspectives], how to navigate between them and the cost if we do not.[18]

Due to our setting taking place among religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika, its crucial to attempt in understanding their perspectives and experiences with a

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[14] Ibid, 133.
[15] Ibid, 140.
[16] Ibid, 146.
[17] Ibid, 181.
[18] Ibid, 1.

colonized Christianity. Their perspectives and experiences have informed their choices to begin migrating from an ancient religious belief system and its selected "sacred" perspectives. Now that we have an idea of who millennials are and the religiously traumatized millennials in our setting, let us begin analyzing some possibilities as to why religiously traumatized millennials are migrating from a colonized Christianity in Amerika during the 21st century.

**A Millennial Migration**

In 1999 C.E., Gallup: a global analytics and advisement firm, collected data that suggested 70% of U.S. citizens were practicing Abrahamic faith and belonged to a Church, Synagogue, or Mosque. However, "in 2020 C.E., [Gallup collected data that suggested] 47% of U.S. [citizens] belonged to a Church, Synagogue or Mosque."[19] This shows us that over the course of two decades, humans in the U.S. have been separating from religions like Christianity in relatively significant numbers. This information offers Christianity an opportunity for accountability and humility; those hurt by religion are on a relative path of healing and yearn for *human depthiness*. A Theopoetic pulling from beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Church" is what traumatized millennials are experiencing. Based on recent surveys from Gallup, we see that millennial's Church membership in the U.S. has been declining. This decline in Church membership and

[19] Gallup Inc, "U.S. Church Membership Falls below Majority for First Time," Gallup.com, March 29, 2021, news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

belonging to an Abrahamic faith like Christianity is evidence that millennials are indeed migrating at an increasing and alarming rate (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Changes in Church Membership by Generation, Over Time. (Gallup)

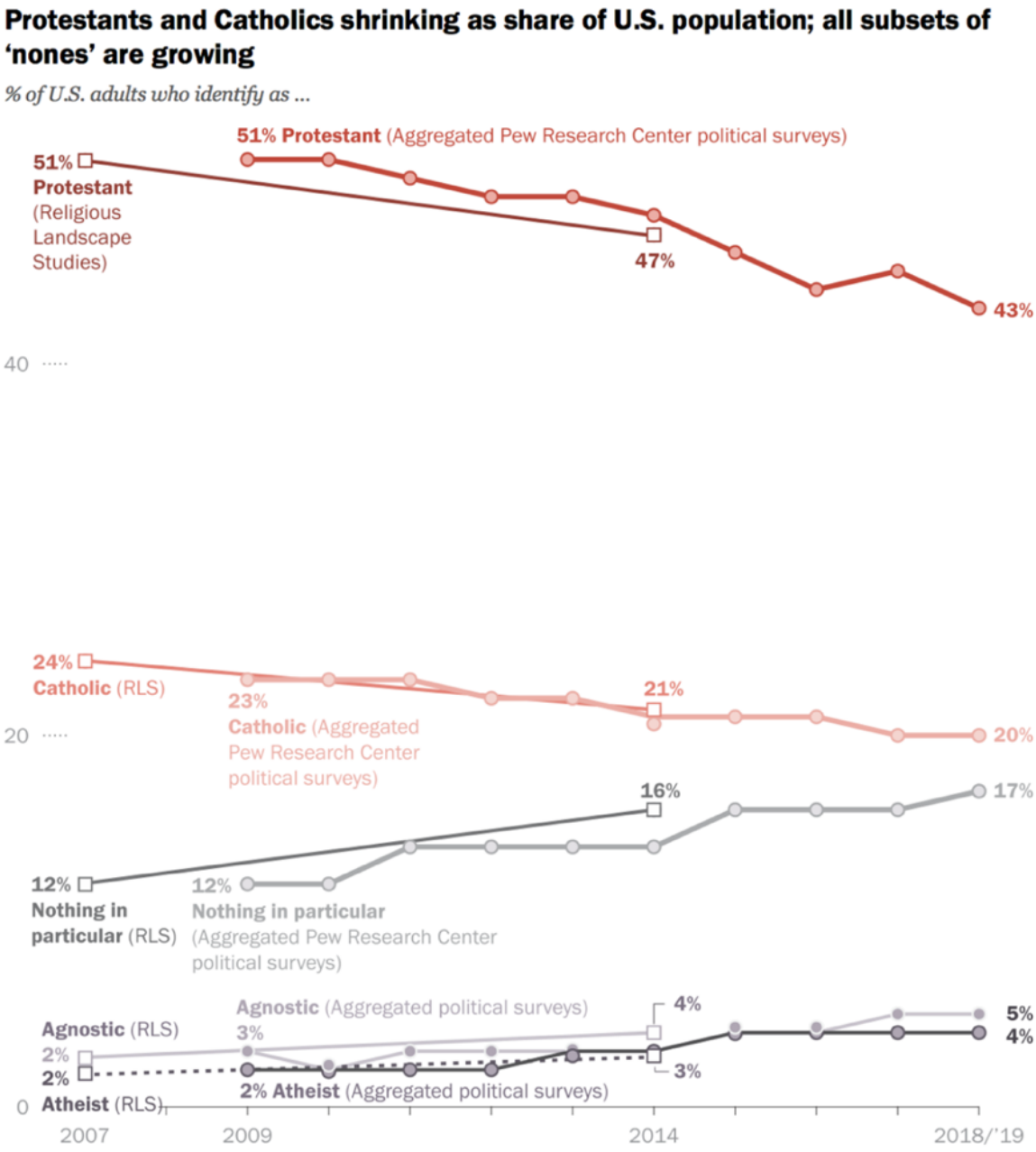
Changes in Church Membership by Generation, Over Time

| | 1998-2000 | 2008-2010 | 2018-2020 | Change since 1998-2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | % | pct. pts. |
| Traditionalists (born before 1946) | 77 | 73 | 66 | -11 |
| Baby boomers (born 1946-1964) | 67 | 63 | 58 | -9 |
| Generation X (born 1965-1980) | 62 | 57 | 50 | -12 |
| Millennials (born 1981-1996) | n/a | 51 | 36 | n/a |

Note: Given that Gallup's polls are based on the 18+ U.S. adult population, the 1980-2000 period would have included only a small proportion of the millennial generation, and the 2018-2020 period includes only a small proportion of Generation Z (born after 1996).

GALLUP

Figure 3: Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone.




Source: Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Studies (2007 and 2014). Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone.
"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"

Figure 4: Large Generational Gap in Amerikan Religion (Pew Research Center)

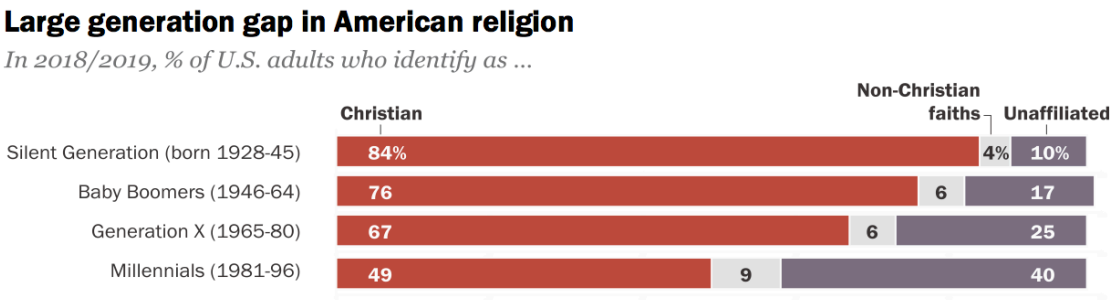



Figure 5: [Seekers] Post-Christian: an increasing trend. (Barna Group)

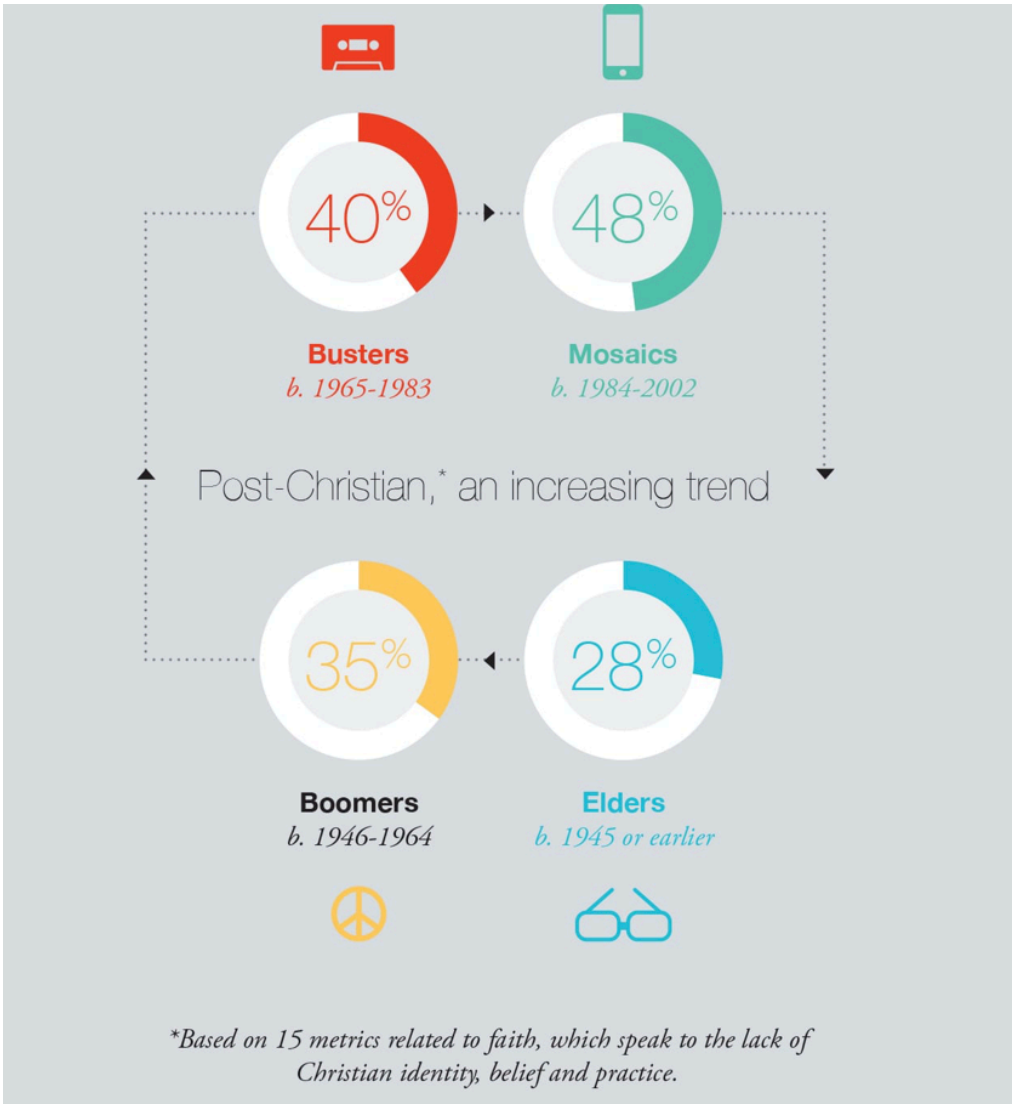


Figure 6: The Rise of Churchlessness in Amerika (Barna Group)

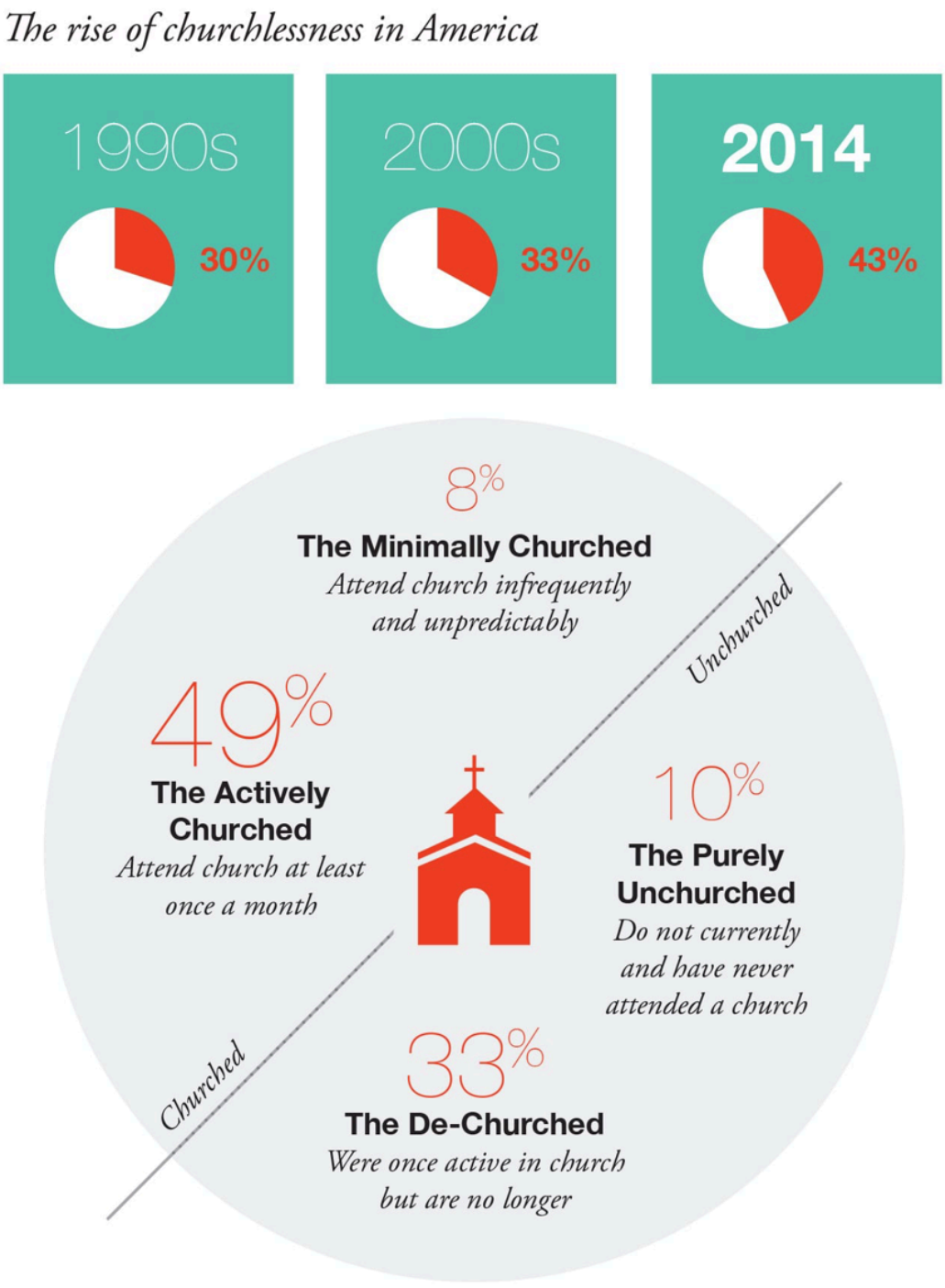
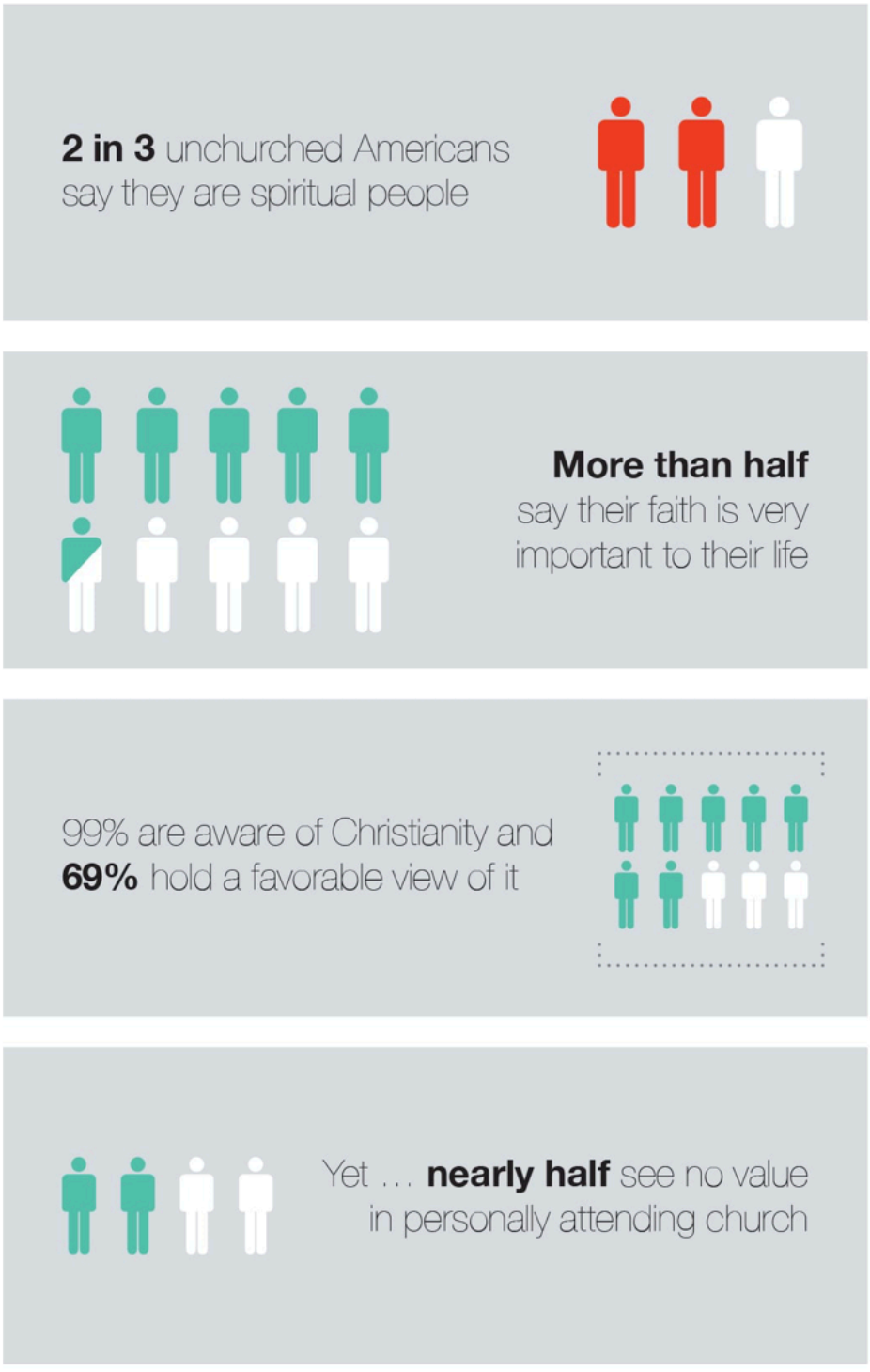


Figure 7: Unchurched Statistics (Barna Group)



In 2018 C.E., The Pew Research Center started collecting data on how U.S. citizens identified themselves within a Christian hegemony Nation: Amerika. An inquiry triggered by significant changes in how humans identified as Christian, Atheist, or *None* in Amerika. A year later, the Pew Research Center unknowingly revealed a part of the migration of religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika when they collected data that suggested a relatively large increase within one year. Between 2018 C.E. & 2019 C.E., the survey reflected an increase from 17% to 26% of humans who identified as *None*.[20] This survey reveals a questionable change in how humans religiously identify in Amerika (see Figure 3 & 4). The increase of humans who rather identify as *None* over Christian is curiously questionable and alarming. We offer a rhetorical question; "what happened in Amerika that affected religiously traumatized millennials and their religious practices in such a way that they would begin to experience a lack of safety, freedom, or spiritual connection in a colonized Christianity?"

Many religiously traumatized millennials continue to be misunderstood in a colonized Christian hegemony country like Amerika; a Theopoetic incubator for a rapidly growing 21st Century Amerikan trend of migrating from a colonized Christianity (see Figure 5). Many religiously traumatized millennials embody a relationship between colonization and Christianity. It's this Theopoetic marriage between Christianity and

[20] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project (Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/. (accessed Feb 1, 2022).

colonization (Christofascist[21]) that is a *fascist[22] authority* subconsciously enforcing and perpetuating a colonized religious criterion for humans on Earth designed out of fear to control. This audaciously inhuman act of colonization[23] and practice of Christian purity culture[24] is causing religious trauma in many millennials living in Amerika. Colonized Christian practitioners have historically used religious doctrine and the Bible to justify and dictate what is right or wrong for all humans living in not just a Christian hegemony nation like Amerika but globally. The colonized Churches imperialistic embodiment of *ancient fascist patriarchal traditions of power[25]* is a part of why so many religiously traumatized millennials have migrated to seek safety and healing beyond organized religion in Amerika.

The Barna Group is an evangelical Christian polling firm based in Ventura, California. They aim to provide spiritual influencers with credible knowledge for critical thinking and enable them to navigate a complex and changing culture. The Barna Group defines an unchurched person as "someone who has not attended a Christian Church service."[26] Simply put, Barna Group is saying that a Churched human is connected, even

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[21] Christofascism, a neologism which was coined in 1970 by the late liberation theologian, Dorothee Sölle.

[22] An authoritarian hierarchical government or structure of power (the Church) who dictates and controls the members of the government or structure (the Body-the People).

[23] The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. This can be achieved physically (slavery), mentally (social influence-laws) and this can be done spiritually (religion).

[24] A subculture of evangelical Christianity. The idea that you must be pure to enter into heaven. Being pure is determined by Christian values. Purity culture is exclusive and absolute.

[25] This Theopoetic statement is referring to the conception and use of Christianity by the Roman Empire in 313 C.E. Then being integrated into another empire: Amerika. These empires are patriarchal and fascist by nature.

[26] Barna Group, et al., *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them: Based on Surveys by Barna Group* (TX: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), 6.

if only tangentially to a Church and unchurched humans are completely disconnected from Christianity.[27] Barna goes on to identify four sub demographics within the unchurched population: 49% actively churched, 8% minimally churched, 33% de-churched and 10% purely unchurched. This religious trauma project will focus on humans within what Barna considers 33% of de-churched (see Figure 6) because Barna describes this sub-demographic as "those who have been churched in the past but are currently on hiatus. -The de-churched are the fastest growing segment, presently one-third of the population."[28] Barna Group, a Christian polling firm is saying that humans who are identified as the 33% de-churched are on "hiatus;" basically saying religiously traumatized millennials are taking a vacation from religion and religion is inevitably the right way. Not only is this choice in words offensive, but belittling. Religiously traumatized millennials who choose to separate from religion, such as a colonized Christianity, are not taking a vacation but, instead, are searching for a relatively deeper connection with God that can bring about healing and personal development.

Barna's data states that the de-churched is a relatively small group and believes "when a group is [this] small, it can be fairly homogeneous. The way that most groups grow (religious or not) is through personal connections, not because of grand, macro-level shifts in philosophical or political sensibilities."[29] Two out of three humans in Amerika claim they are spiritual, yet half believe there is no point to personally attending Church (see Figure 7). Our setting focuses on the many religiously traumatized

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 7.
[29] Ryan P Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going,* 2nd ed (MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 69.

millennials who are among what Barna considers the de-churched demographic. Remembering what religiously traumatized millennials experienced in Amerika during the ’90s, as well as how these events affected and influenced their choices like leaving a colonized Christianity; we must consider that 30% of general millennials in Amerika struggle to support themselves (poverty), 38% are overwhelmed with student loan repayments (debt), 51% still live at home with their parents or guardian (co-dependent), 44% find it difficult to pay for education and 40% are unemployed, yet 79% possesses college degrees (educated).[30]

Religiously traumatized millennials are overwhelmed with an intersectionality of issues and need relative solutions that service their struggle to endure poverty, debt, over qualifications, codependency and religious trauma. Religiously traumatized millennials seek a genuinely spiritual connection with God: a direct relationship with Source. It’s from their challenges and traumas that we witness their developing of an indescribable way to seek something greater: something beyond “The Four Walls of Colonized Church, Synagogue or Mosque.”

[30] Ibid, 143.

**Seekers**

Theopoetically, the religiously traumatized millennials in our setting who have migrated from religion have been searching and seeking for something beyond what can be seen with human eyes. Author D. Patrick Miller writes, "many individuals who identify as [Spiritual But Not Religious] would describe themselves as seekers. -The greatest theological shift is one from God out there to God in here. Likely, as a result of the influence of Eastern traditions, [seekers] generally believe in a God within—representing the greatest human potential available to us all."[31] The millennials in our setting often align more with SBNR because of the numerous possibilities to do something different from what is normal. Whereas religions that have merged with colonization like Christianity are a binary system of faith and worship: its doctrine provides definition, boundaries, and limitations between two things; everything is measured between *good & evil*.

Life in a colonized Church is perceived through an absolute past: a focus on an absolute image of God; one way. Whereas life beyond the colonized Church can and is perceived through an unfinished multi-faith process: a focus on journeying an unfollowable path, a mutually immanent relationship with a relative God. The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are more interested in a multi-faith path that reflects a continuous process because freedom then becomes deeply relative and achievable; they realize that they aren't as good or bad as they were led to believe

[31] D. Patrick Miller, "The Rapid Dying of Religion and the Rise of a Universal Spirituality," www.fearlessbooks.com/ReligionDying (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

through colonized Christian doctrine. They are choosing to practice or pursue a form of connection with God that is considered spiritual but not religious because its relative to their experiences and understandings of how the Universe works (Modern-Day Copernicans).

> According to Dr. Siobhan Chandler, a Victoria-based sociologist of religion, being Spiritual But Not Religious allows you to sidestep the negative assumptions that organized religions are dull and out of touch, incite fear and mistreat women and minorities. Over the past five years, the Spiritual But Not Religious movement has reached critical mass. The term encompasses not only the mind-body-spirit set (think Zoë Kravitz's lumin-ous, bohemian, yoga-practicing character in Big Little Lies) but also anyone who believes that spiritual growth can be furthered outside the confines of organized religion.[32]

We believe that the, *Spiritual But Not Religious* (SBNR) movement is an early ember of what has been set ablaze by so many seekers; humans who choose not to live within the strict and unforgiving boundaries of religion and instead, chooses to intuitively pursue a relatively natural chaotic process of individuation[33] in order to attempt to understand Self more in-depth and its relationship with everything else. There is no one over all reason as to why religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika are leaving colonized religions like a colonized Christianity. However, a Christian Pastor, Jason Jimenez offers an interesting perspective about millennials in his book with Alex McFarland in 2017 C.E. called, "Abandoned Faith: a Focus on Parenting." Pastor Jimenez contributes seven key responses from religiously traumatized millennial's when

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[32] Katherine Gougeon, "The New New Age: "Spiritual But Not Religious," *FASHION Magazine*, December 2017, fashionmagazine.com/lifestyle/spiritual-but-not-religious/ (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

[33] Edward F Edinger, *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the* Psyche (MA: Shambhala, 1991), 158. "Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality."

asked the question: why are young people (religiously traumatized millennials) abandoning "the faith" (colonized Christianity)*?*

**Seven Reasons Millennials Are Leaving Christianity**[34]

1. Many millennials who claim to be Christians never had a true conversion to begin with.
2. The simple fact that a large majority of Christian parents have done a poor job living out their faith and raising their children in the Bible.
3. Doubts about the Bible and common objections about Christianity often get the best of millennials. -young people say they never really felt they could express their doubts and concerns regarding Christianity at home or in the Church.
4. Millennials fail to see the connection faith has to culture. When millennials grow up, they have no idea the role faith should play in their careers, personal interests, or future lives.
5. Hypocrisy and compromise in the Church play a significant role in many millennials abandoning the faith.
6. The majority of millennials are biblically illiterate.
7. Millennials have never actually been taught about life, work, death, and resurrection of [Yeshua] Christ.

[34] Alex Mcfarland and Jason Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home* (IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2017), 27-32.

Pastor Jimenez offers us an opportunity to process Theopoetically what has happened between children (religiously traumatized millennials) and the colonized Church (Theopoetic Parent/Mother symbol) by focusing on the parents and how Christianity has been understood as well as experienced through them. “Parents are the most influential and most powerful force in a child’s life.”[35] Pastor Jimenez contributes a crucial point to the understanding of why religiously traumatized millennials are migrating from religion. How religiously traumatized millennials parents or symbols of authority practiced and discipled them (colonized them) has a large part to do with why they are migrating from colonized religion in relatively large numbers. The most religiously traumatized millennials believe that a colonized Christianity was given or forced on to them, they didn’t willingly choose to practice colonized Christianity, they were left without a choice.

The Copernican’s in our setting tend to see the colonized Church as an irrelevant relic of the past.[36] “The [colonized] Churches don’t really impact their surroundings because, other than maintaining a building, the [humans] who go there don’t connect with the [humans] outside its four walls.”[37] Pastor Jimenez says: “Relationships have always been at the heart of the gospel and how we share the Good News of [Yeshua]. – [colonized] Churches do not naturally facilitate relationships.”[38] The Copernican’s in our setting need space as well as the opportunity to develop community and an authentic relationship with a God within: Self. Our setting pleads with us to Theopoetically dive

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[35] Ibid, 32.
[36] Ibid, 57.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, 58.

into the depths of our multi-faith ministerial challenge: to co-create spaces for religiously traumatized millennials to start healing religious trauma; we propose Between | Space's.

## Chapter 2: Preliminary Analysis of the Challenge

My name is Aaron Christopher Michael Chengte (chan-tay) Waldron; we are a religiously traumatized Theopoet: a Shaman in journey. Our pronouns are *they*, *their* and *them*. We do not identify in the singular first-person pronoun (I), but instead, we identify as a collective[39] third person pronoun (we). Throughout this dissertation, we will use illeism to refer to our Self as *me, us, ours,* and *we*. Our primary method of expression and analysis is Theopoetics; a Theo-philosophical aesthetic method that developed out of the 1960's *Death of God theology*[40] or *Radical Theology*.[41] Theopoetics is a hermeneutical framework that is liberating by nature and aims to bring into relationship the embodiment and the numinous (Sacredness/Divinity) through poetry. We imagine Theopoetics as a poetically theological and spiritual method of empathizing, communicating, and relating to an indescribable God beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." A relatively sacred (numinous) language that intimately brings pieces of poetic analysis, theology, mythology, spirituality, and meta-modernity together momentarily to attempt to describe the indescribable. The combining of the two Greek words: *theo* (θεό) and *poiein*

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[39] Daryl Sharp, *JUNG LEXICON: A Primer of Terms & Concepts* (Canada: Inner City Books, 1991), 18. Psychic contents that belong not to one individual but to a society, a people, or the human race in general. [CW 7, par. 244.]

[40] In 1961, Gabriel Vahanian's published a book called, "The Death of God." Vahanian argued that modern secular culture had lost all sense of the sacred, lacking any sacramental meaning, no transcendental purpose or sense of providence. He concluded that for the modern mind "God is dead".

[41] A contemporary theological movement challenging traditional Judeo-Christian belief about God and asserting that human beings must take moral as well as spiritual accountability/responsibility for themselves.

(ποίησις) creates a symbol, expression and way of life that means: *to make or shape relating to God or deities.*

A Theopoetic expression is one that "reveals some aspect of the divine"[42]in all things to include a 21st Century religiously traumatized Theopoet: a Shaman in Journey. We have been shaped and molded by our traumas but also by Theopoetic *pillars* like, the late Brazilian poet, theologian, philosopher and psychoanalyst, Rubem A. Alves who offered a creative and imaginative way of mixing poetry, prayer, mysticism, and theology together. This poetically theological interpretation was manifested by Alves when he wrote a paper called: "next to the rivers of Babylon" while at Union Theological Seminary in 1964 C.E. Alves wrote in a way that allowed him to express and articulate the difficult and traumatizing revolutionary processes occurring in his home country. Alves Theopoetic interpretations helped us see how our own human experiences and traumas relate to theological and philosophical beliefs. We feel comforted by his way of expression in his books, "Tomorrows Child"*[43]* and "A Theology of Human Hope."*[44]*

The late French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard offered a Theopoetic perspective and exploration of the phenomenology of imagination in order to clarify the term *poetic image*. In his book, "The Poetics of Space,"[45] Bachelard focuses on describing and expressing through architectural symbols in poetry. He offers a reimagining of how imagination is in relationship with space that occupies Spirit and meaning. Bachelard

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[42] L. B. C. Keefe-Perry, "Theopoetics: Process and Perspective," *Christianity & Literature* 58, no. 4 (September 2009): 579–601, https://doi.org/10.1177/014833310905800404.

[43] Rubem A. Alves, *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* (OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011).

[44] Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (IN: Abby Press, 1972).

[45] Gaston Bachelard*, The Poetics of Space* (NY: Penguin Books, 2014).

goes on to further explore how that very same space that is filled with imagination, Spirit and meanings also evokes feelings, memories, and fantasies. He believed that no actual space could satisfy the poetic imagination and so, this idea unlocked our mind from an ancient human prison of a colonized perspective. Through Theopoetics, we choose to see our Self as a poetic image: an inter-dimensionally infinite process that will never be done. This keeps us humble, true, and accountable to the things outside of our human control, to include God.

The late British mathematician and philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead offered an idea that suggest reality consists of processes rather than material objects and that *processes* are best defined by their relations with other processes. This means that nothing can be defined or understood separate (alone) from anything else, all things are interconnected and form a collective. It's through his books, "Process and Reality"[46] as well as "Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect,"[47] that we are inspired by the concept of mutual immanence; it helped to shape our Theopoetic imagination to imagine how humans are *Living Symbol*'s[48] that are affected by God as much as God is affected by *Living Symbol's*. We feel empowered by the notion that life is a series of processes, and nothing really ends but transforms. Whitehead influences the formation of our Theopoetic

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[46] Alfred North Whitehead, et al., *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, corrected* (New York: The Free Press, 1985).

[47] Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect: Barbour-Page Lectures, University of Virginia, 1927* (NY: Fordham University Press, 1985).

[48] David Ray Griffin, *Archetypal Process: Self and Divine and Whitehead, Jung, and Hillman* (IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 78. "A truly living symbol compels unconscious participation, and has a life-giving, and life-enhancing effect. - [Jung's definition of symbol] A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible expression of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented, is symbolic… So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way."

eschatology: the considerate and artistic study of the alpha & omega (beginning and end) of a process or collection of processes at any particular point in time, free from binary and colonized ways of understanding process.

The late Romanian historian of religion and philosopher, Mircea Eliade explored the universal structures (ways of thinking) of religious experience that are shared across all human cultures. Eliade proposed that the central "thing" uniting all religions is the experience of the sacred (numinous), a divine life force/energy. In Eliade's books, "The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion"[49] as well as "Images & Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism;"[50] he stretched us to believe experiences of the sacred emerge from hierophanies: manifestations of the sacred within the human experience such as through ritual, dreams, or nature.

Finally, the late Swiss Jungian psychologist and scholar, Dr. Marie-Louise von Franz contributed a holistic imagination that influenced us to feel the need to keep an inter-dimensional connection between matter, Spirit, and the unconscious. By not considering the inter-dimensionality of these aspects of reality, humanity risk being colonized by dogma, regulation, and facts: fascistly confined by absolute concepts and absolute truths. In her book, "Alchemy: an Introduction to The Symbolism and The Psychology,"[51] she reminds us of how open we should be as Theopoetic analyst attempting to make sense of indescribable trauma like millennials religious trauma.

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[49] Mircea Eliade, et al., *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Book, 1987).

[50] Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (London: Harvill, 1961).

[51] Marie-Luise Von Franz, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980).

These Theopoetic *pillars* have shaped and held together how we embody and experience Theopoetics in the 21st Century. Our religious traumas have inspired us to seek, create and develop our own Theopoetic language to express and communicate relatively new meanings, symbols, and myths out of a journey of religious trauma healing. Theopoetics empowers us to temporarily express, analyze and reveal the fragile truths of an indescribable God in a mutually immanent[52] relationship with all things. Our Theopoetic *pillars* empower us to identify, analyze, empathize, and express sacredness beyond spaces socially designated as sacred or safe like a colonized Christian Church in Amerika. As a 21st century Theopoet, we are gravitationally pulled into relationship with religiously traumatized millennials. It's through our *being pulled* that we use our own experiences, spirituality, imagination, and religious trauma to Theopoetically express and advocate for a community of humans who are religiously traumatized and are navigating life beyond a colonized Christianity. We are one example or testimony of the many who suffer from religious trauma and navigate life beyond a colonized Christianity in Amerika. Theopoetically through me as a *Living Symbol* of religious trauma and experiences, you are given the opportunity to witness as well as empathize with religiously traumatized millennials and their choice to migrate from a colonized Christianity in Amerika.

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[52] Andrew M. Davis, *Mind, Value, and Cosmos. On the Relational Nature of Ultimacy* (PA: Rowman & Littlefield Pub, 2021), 199. God, and the world also remain mutually transcendent such that any world happening owes it to its existence its own actualization as its own decision of unification of its relationality.

Theopoetically, we are what Buddhism refers to as a *Bodhisattva:*[53] one who becomes a *forest-dweller* (Vanaprasthi). A *Bodhisattva* is a human in journey to becoming a Buddha (relatively the highest state of human consciousness and healing) "but who renounces entry to Nirvana [beyond time-Heaven] in order to help other beings [like religiously traumatized millennials] through compassion or empathy with their suffering [: religious trauma]. This compassion creates a deep resolve to assist others to become free from the wheel of Samsara [Daily life]."[54] We are unapologetically a Shaman in journey because we desperately yearn to experience and understand the many sorrows and sufferings of religious trauma in daily life. We are a Shaman who has Theopoetically been pulled out of a colonized Christianity to journey with religiously traumatized humans who have migrated from relatively harmful religious spaces and practices. Recent research shows that there is a significant number of millennials migrating from Christianity in Amerika due to unresolved religious trauma experienced within a colonized Christian faith community (a state of consciousness) (see Figure 9-10). Religiously traumatized millennials often find it difficult to encounter therapeutic and inclusive spaces to seek relative healing. We have observed religiously traumatized millennials rising interest in experiencing and understanding God through a meta-spiritual/multi-faith relational perspective beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." This multi-faith dissertation project will attempt to co-create a series of relative, restorative, and revolutionary spaces that invite humans to an online meta-

[53] Śāntideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (MA: Shambhala, 2008).

[54] Ron Geaves, *Key Words in Buddhism* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 14.

spiritual community that empowers multi-faith as well as religiously traumatized millennials to start healing unresolved religious trauma. We aim to co-create spaces that allow religiously traumatized humans to develop a personal relationship with a God within: Self; we propose Between | Space.

Theopoetically, Between | Space will offer humans an opportunity to reconnect with their Self and understand their Self in a relatively healthier way. This process will initiate what Joseph Campbell calls: a Hero's Journey or monomyth[55] (see Figure 8) and does not require a Bible, a blood sacrifice, doctrine or being colonized. Based on how religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are responding to colonized religion in Amerika; Between | Space offers a relatively safer community space for those seeking something beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." Spaces designed with the modern-day *Copernican* in mind, those journeying towards healing religious trauma, while strengthening their ability to create as well as maintain a relatively healthy relationship with an inner-God as well as a meta-spiritual community in the 21st century. There is a plethora of traumas that exist in each human, Theopoetically we refer to this inner psycho-spiritual space as *inner-terrestrial* because its relatively unexplored, unknown and creates fear; similar to how the average human in the U.S. is afraid of aliens or extraterrestrial.[56] Humans are often afraid of what they don't understand, to include their Self. So, allow us to explain Theopoetically who we are, where we came

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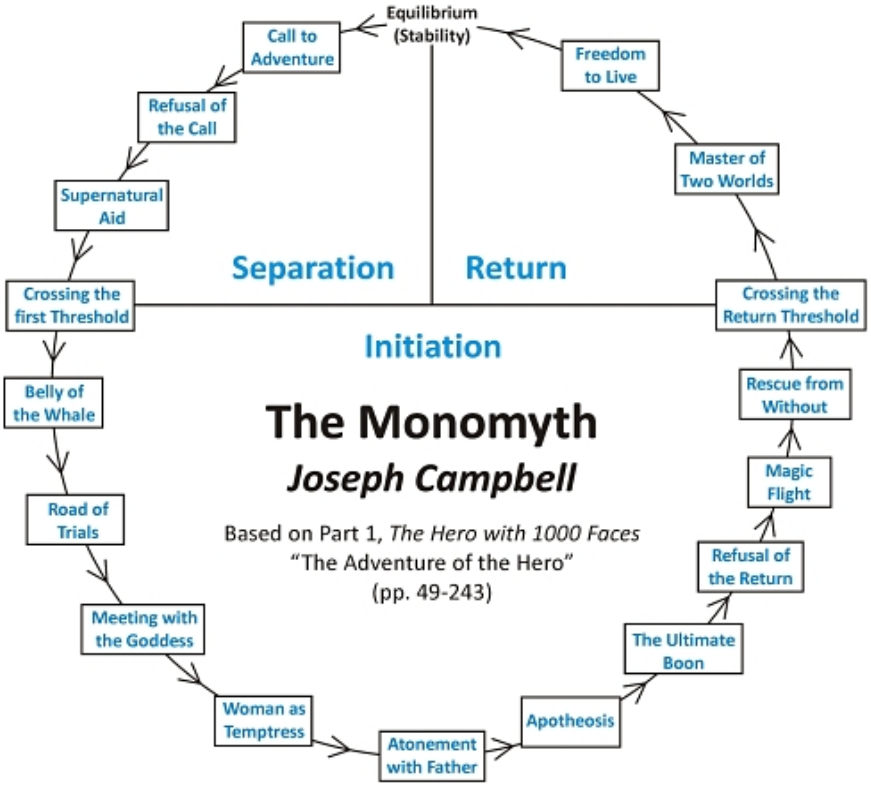
[55] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces: A Brilliant Examination, through Ancient Hero Myths, of Man's Eternal Struggle for Identity* (London: Fontana Press, 1949), 49-243.

[56] Gordon Fraser, "Perspective | U.S. Worries about Space Aliens and UFOs Are Older than You Think," Washington Post, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/06/25/us-worries-about-space-aliens-ufos-are-older-than-you-think/ (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

from and why we are advocating for the healing of religiously traumatized millennials existing beyond a colonized Christianity in Amerika.

Figure 8: The Monomyth (Joseph Campbell)




Don Jose Ruiz, a Toltec Shaman from Southern Central Mexico, defines a Shaman as a *nagual,* meaning "The Awakened Ones,"[57] in Nahuatl language. Nagual, or Shaman symbolizes "the life force energy, the Divinity that we all have inside of us-the Shamans are the ones whose eyes are open to this realization."[58] A Shaman can be anyone who has experienced an *inner awakening* causing their *third eye/chakra* (spiritual

[57] Jose Ruiz, *Wisdom of the Shamans: What the Ancient Masters Can Teach Us about Love and Life* (TX: Hierophant Publishing, 2019), xii.
[58] Ibid.

eye) to open and see their relationship with Creation in a different way: realizing that the original *Source*/God is in Us (God within). As a Shaman in journey, we have come to believe that "I" (Individual) cannot bring change to the world, but "we" (Collectively/Together) can bring change to the world. We believe that a Shaman's journey must continuously consider the effects of mutual immanence[59] between Self and God (everything): the religious relationship housed within us. Theopoetically, we imagine God being this vast Ocean of energy that sustains as well as creates life everywhere; we find ourselves swimming (deeply connected to all things) in and with an *Ocean of God*. Realizing that we are all interconnected regardless of our differences, my concern for my own religious trauma inspired me to consider how others are affected by religious trauma and walk with them. God provided the breeze and soon the flames of passion set ablaze, to explore the many ways we can be present in the 21st Century to reimagine community, myths and language for millennials experiencing religious trauma in Amerika.

Feminist anthropologist and archaeologist, Alice Beck Kehoe describes Shamans as a necessary healing symbol[60] centered in *community healing* when she says, "healing thus is of more than individual benefit, because an incapacitated person requires sustenance and time from others. We gregarious mammals do not easily abandon

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[59] Davis, *Mind, Value, and Cosmos: On the Relational Nature of Ultimacy*, 199. God, and the world also remain mutually transcendent such that any world happening owes it to its existence its own actualization as its own decision of unification of its relationality.

[60] Griffin, *Archetypal Process,* 78. [Jung's definition of symbol] A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible expression of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented, is symbolic… So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way.

members of our group; instead, we seek means to restore them to normal capacity."[61] As a Shaman who has separated from colonized Christianity and its religious community due to my own religious traumas; we wish to form a space of community for those Theopoetically wandering aimlessly in the dark wilderness looking for *milk and honey*. We feel compelled to co-create new spaces of opportunity for religiously traumatized millennials like us who seek to start understanding as well as healing their religious trauma and develop a relationship with God beyond colonized faiths and practices: no more *middle-men*.

Like us, religiously traumatized millennials in our setting have decided to stop practicing organized religion, particularly colonized versions of Christianity in Amerika to seek relative answers that point us to the great indescribable phenomenon: God. It's important that we experience God for our Self and not be told what God is by colonized religion's. Our setting affirms that we are not alone in experiencing religious trauma and migrating from a religious way of life like a colonized Christianity. We wish to understand this demographic that is experiencing religious trauma and exile in Amerika, so that Theopoetic language can be co-created to bridge past to present; so that the possibilities of future are relatively healthier. It's in our religiously absolute past that we begin to understand why we are presently experiencing several religious traumas. How and why has God called us to journey outside "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion?"

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[61] Alice Beck Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion: An Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking* (IL: Waveland Press, 2000), 27.

**A Journey of Identity**

We haven't always identified as a Shaman in journey: who we are today is a result of a cosmically unique collaboration of experiences and a painful process of letting go. We started this journey in the streets of Brooklyn as a poor Pisces boy who over time developed into a spiritually traumatized Queer[62] Black[63] Pisces who remains trapped within an urban capitalistic dilemma: Amerika. When we were born, the doctor on shift told the nurses to keep me separated from my *mother*; my *mother* sniffed cocaine repeatedly while she was pregnant with me and some of it entered into my bloodstream. We were birthed into an ecstasy experience that would allow us the opportunity to encounter liminal space during an infancy period. In an incubator is where we were physically, but our collective essence was with Source, undergoing a process of Self-cultivation. We were what hospitals label "a premature baby." My *mother* underwent a Cesarean delivery (C-section) so that we may have a fighting chance to experience life. She voluntarily had the surgical staff cut through her abdomen to make a way for me to come into this World. Within seconds we were violently pulled from the Source and tossed into an extremely hostile urban environment. We were born into an absolute system: labeled and tagged with a nine-digit identification number. Within my first few breaths as a newborn baby, we were given a name, gender, pre-approved limited access and a life expectancy. We were thrown into a Theopoetically *old smelly box*: a system of

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[62] Lisa Isherwood, and Marcella Althaus-Reid. *Trans/Formations* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 17. [Queer] Whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant (status-quo).

[63] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 12. an experience that has a person exist in a system of racism, a life of humiliation and suffering. Blackness symbolizes oppression and liberation in any society.

control, built by slaves for slaves. We're referring to the Amerikan dream: a system of slavery and exploitation (colonization).

We were expected to stay within a religiously *old smelly box* and perish with the hope of going to a place Christianity refers to as heaven. As a young child, we were expected to be seen and not heard. However, it felt more like we were unseen by our Mother, the Church and Country. As a child, we became accustomed to not being seen or acknowledged in public and in the Church. We were homeless most times, living on the streets, doing odd jobs or favors for an *odd few dollars*. We lived a nomadic life, living in shelters throughout our childhood and having no place to call home. Our traumatic life caused us to portray a Theopoetic hurt child archetype: living in our head most times, daydreaming of a better life experience.[64] Along with being an introvert, we found safety in our solitude: our imagination had no limits. It's in our solitude that we Theopoetically imagined symbols of advocacy but never associated the Church with the poetic image of advocacy.

Our nomadic lifestyle granted us the miracle of experiencing a television during a time when we were receiving public housing: we had a two-bedroom apartment with cold lifeless walls. During this time, we only watched public cable: whatever could be watched with a bent metal hanger to receive a clear picture. At times we would stand behind the television holding the hanger antenna with one hand in a very odd but

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[64] Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 101. "Because traumatized people often have trouble sensing what is going on in their bodies, they lack a nuanced response to frustration. They either react to stress by becoming *spaced out* or with excessive anger."

strenuous position to get a clear picture so that our mother could watch her favorite show. Television was God in a box, where we could get lost in watching the many hypnotizing moving images. Television made me feel safe, it was a box of possibilities and wonder. The moving symbols spoke to who we are and our passions; shows on PBS (Public Broadcasting Station) like, Sesame Street, Puzzle Place, Reading Rainbow, Barney and Mr. Rogers Neighborhood would take our mind to indescribable places: relatively sacred spaces.

We honestly learned more about Self in relationship to the world from television; our mother, school or the colonized Church failed to prepare us the way television programs did. We learned how to count and contextualize from programs like Sesame Street. We learned how to socialize and express feelings from programs like Barney and Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. We had the deepest dialogs with Mr. Rogers on things that affected our spirit as well as our body. We daydreamed of symbols in motion and would pretend to embody these incredible advocating symbols. My mother didn't have much to give or offer but she was able to gift me a theological inheritance: a Theopoetic marriage between Christianity and colonization that is a fascist authority subconsciously enforcing and perpetuating a colonized religious criterion for humans on Earth.

To be a colonized Christian is to be pure, decent, chosen, obedient and law abiding based on the authoritatively colonized interpretations of sacred text in a poor urban context (the Ghetto), we are expected to have faith in an absolutely bias God with human fatherly traits and follow the "King of Kings" because it is believed to be *the way* in a patriarchal-imperialistic system of exploitation. My mother: an ambassador of a colonized Christianity colonized me in the faith to be decent and obedient to the laws of

God that are synonymous with the laws of the land. We identified as Christian because our mother believed she was Christian. Our poor life and hardship were ignored and disregarded when we were told to "have faith." Our mother believed that by being Christian, we were chosen people and God would protect us from evil. We now associate being a colonized Christian with the Theopoetic imagery and feeling of being dead: lifeless and enslaved. It deeply hurts us that we could not express our Self or breathe in a colonized Christian community; a publicly and socially designated sacred space -none the less, we feel the gravitational pull of God to journey with religiously traumatized millennials who find themselves traversing relatively dark confusing paths with trauma wounds caused by toxic immature discipleship practiced in colonized Christian spaces like the Amerikan Church. We are being called to free-fall into the Abyss of Self and to use our wounds and traumas to help others in their journey to discovering Self in Amerika.

**Religious Trauma Syndrome**

The symbolic parents of religiously traumatized millennials, whether a colonized Church or colonized humans; collectively we all played a significant part in the experiencing of religious trauma. So much that religious trauma has now influenced many religiously traumatized millennials to choose a different path and leave what they knew most of their life: a colonized Christianity in Amerika. "Religious trauma syndrome (RTS) occurs when an individual struggles with leaving a religion or a set of beliefs that has led to their indoctrination. It often involves the trauma of breaking away from a controlling environment, lifestyle, or [religion]. In some settings the symptoms of

religious trauma can be similar to that of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD)."[65]

> Religious Trauma Syndrome is not an actual diagnosis and is not included in the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5). However, this does not mean that it is non-existent or doesn't impact millions of individuals every year. Religion can easily be weaponized, and sayings can be twisted to fit the agenda of the messenger. Shame, guilt, and condemnation can be among many of the harmful messages communicated which can lead to lasting and deep mental health wounds and damage to the psyche.[66]

The many within our setting who "leave religion in Ameri[k]a become isolated from their former [colonized faith] communities, which can make them anxious, depressed, or even suicidal. -No deconversion story is the same, but many who leave behind strongly held religious beliefs can see an impact on their health."[67] Our concern for the millennials in our setting who have unresolved religious trauma and have migrated from a colonized Christianity (religion) is inspired by a psychologist who specializes in religious recovery, Marlene Winell, Ph.D. She defined "the term *religious trauma* as pervasive psychological damage resulting from religious messages, beliefs, and experiences."[68] We believe that those in our setting who have migrated from a

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[65] Alisha Powell, PhD, LCSW and Benjamin Troy, MD, "Religious Trauma Syndrome: Examples, Symptoms, & 7 Ways to Cope," www.choosingtherapy.com/religious-trauma-syndrome/ (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

[66] Richard Schiffman, "When Religion Leads to Trauma," *The New York Times*, 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/well/mind/religion-trauma-lgbt-gay-depression-anxiety.html (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

[67] Jon Fortenbury, "The Health Effects of Leaving Religion," The *Atlantic*, 2014, www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/09/the-health-effects-of-leaving-religion/379651/ (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

[68] Alyson M. Stone, "Thou Shalt Not: Treating Religious Trauma and Spiritual Harm with Combined Therapy," *Group* 37, no. 4 (2013): 323, doi.org/10.13186/group.37.4.0323 (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

colonized religion or way of life such as colonized Christianity, they are experiencing something equivalent to post traumatic stress disorder. Christian Pastor, Michael Walrond Jr., said: "some Churches weaponize scripture and religion to do very deep damage on the psyche."[69]

> We think of Church as a place of healing and transformation, and it is, says Michael Walrond Jr., pastor of the First Corinthian Baptist Church in Harlem. But for some, he says, "religion has been more bruising and damaging than healing and transformative. Pastor Mike, as he is called, leads services in a renovated art deco movie palace on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. Under his direction, the Church has taken a lead in confronting an issue that few other religious institutions have tackled: what some call religious trauma syndrome.[70]

Religious trauma doesn't just affect religiously traumatized millennials after they migrate from a colonized Christianity, its constantly present since its conception of abuse and violence. Religious trauma quietly exists underneath the surface of our persona, where the world and public cannot see. Those in our setting often will suppress or sacrifice what they feel and have experienced to serve or uphold a community symbol like the colonized Church or colonized interpretation of Christ (see Figure 9). The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are seeking to experience individuation:[71] a relative journey inward towards Self, a process of healing through Self myth making. A colonized Church is not the space for individuation to be a process due to its fascistly communal focus on making many into one pure absolute image of God:

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[69] Schiffman, "When Religion Leads to Trauma."
[70] Ibid.
[71] Sharp, *JUNG LEXICON: A Primer of Terms & Concepts*, 39. A process of psychological differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality. In general, it is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. [ CW6, par. 757.]

which is experienced by religiously traumatized millennials as colonization (see Figure 9).

This has religiously traumatic effects in us that create a plethora of inner psycho-spiritual dimensions, each representing an unresolved and unaware trauma (see Figure 10). We believe that when a human leaves a colonized religion like Christianity, Theopoetically, they experience a relative *snap*. For example, if the psyche was a twig and experienced pressure from polar ends, the pressure would cause a *snapping* of the twig (psyche) in two. The *snapping* of their psyche (trauma) creates a "flight or fight"[72] response. This instinctive human response is partly why so many religiously traumatized millennials in our setting have migrated out of a colonized Christianity in Amerika.

> When the collective psyche [Church] is in a stable state, the vast majority of individuals share a common living myth or deity [Religion]. Each individual projects [their] inner God-image (the Self) to the religion of the community. The collective religion [like Christianity] then serves as the container of the Self for a multitude of individuals. The reality of the transpersonal life-forces is mirrored in the external imagery that the church embodies in its symbolism, mythology, rites and dogma. As long as it is functioning adequately, the Church protects the society against any widespread inflation or alienation. Such a stable state of affairs is represented diagrammatically [(See Figure 9)]. Although this situation is stable it has its defects. The Self or God-image is still unconscious, i.e., not recognized as an inner, psychic entity. Although the community of believers will be in relative harmony with one another because of their shared projection, the harmony is illusory and to some extent spurious. In relation to the church the individuals will be in a state of collective identification or participation mystique and will not have made any unique, individual relation to the Self. If now the outer church loses its capacity to carry the projection of the Self, we have the condition which Nietzsche announced for the modern world, "God is dead!"[73] [See Figure 10]

[72] An automatic physiological reaction to an event that is perceived as stressful or frightening.
[73] Edinger, *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the* Psyche*,* 65.

The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are a group of humans that have become relatively more aware of what is religiously and traumatically affecting them in an intersectional way. They realize that they are more than what colonized Christianity and its colonized interpretations of the Bible has said they are and seek to find meaning through and in their own spiritual experiences. [Religiously Traumatized Millennials] Where God could be found for their parents and grandparents; God isn't there for them, God is relatively beyond the colonized synthetically sacred space of purity designated by imperialistic colonizers.

Figure 9: The Stable State of a community of religious believers.

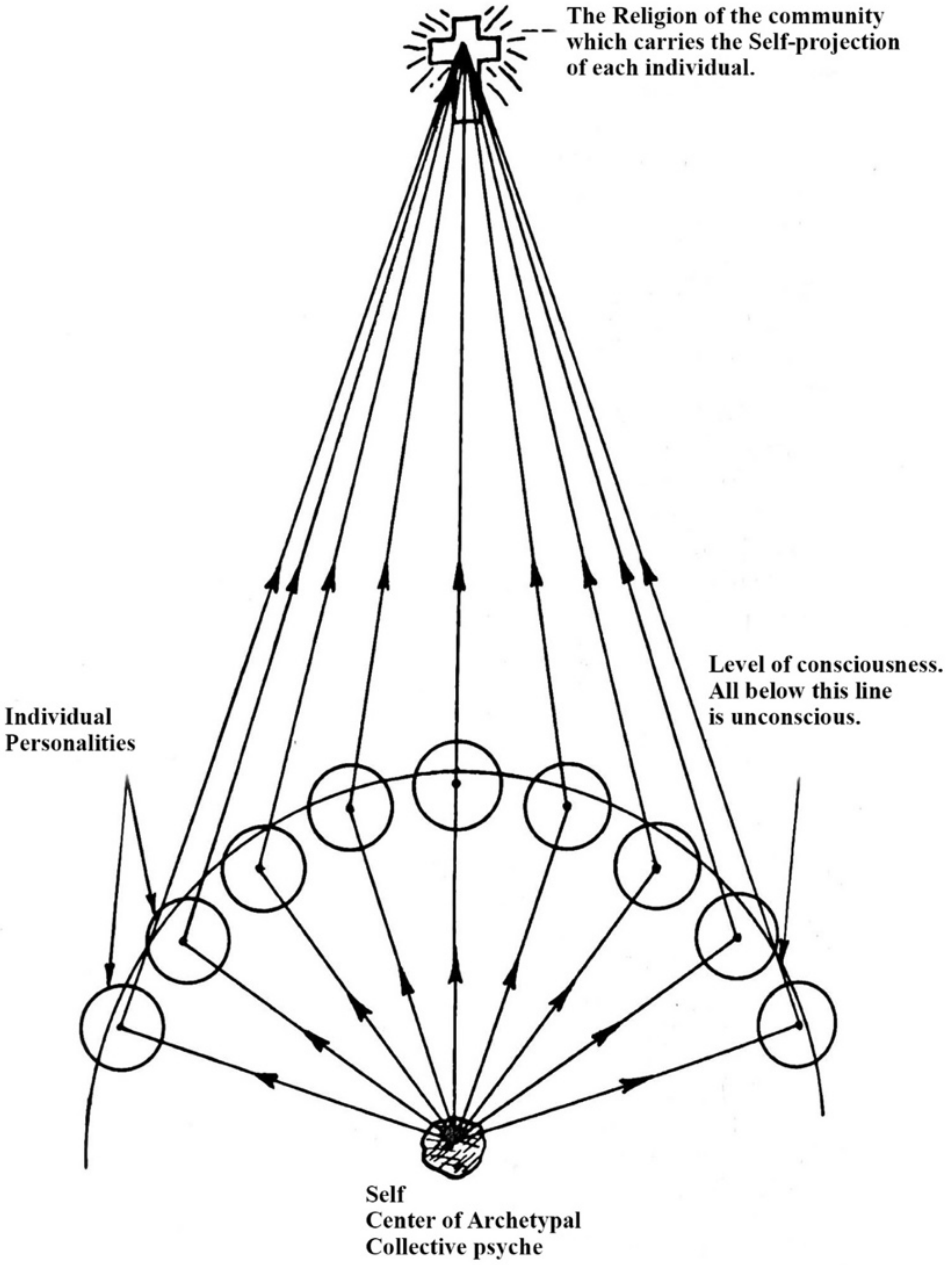
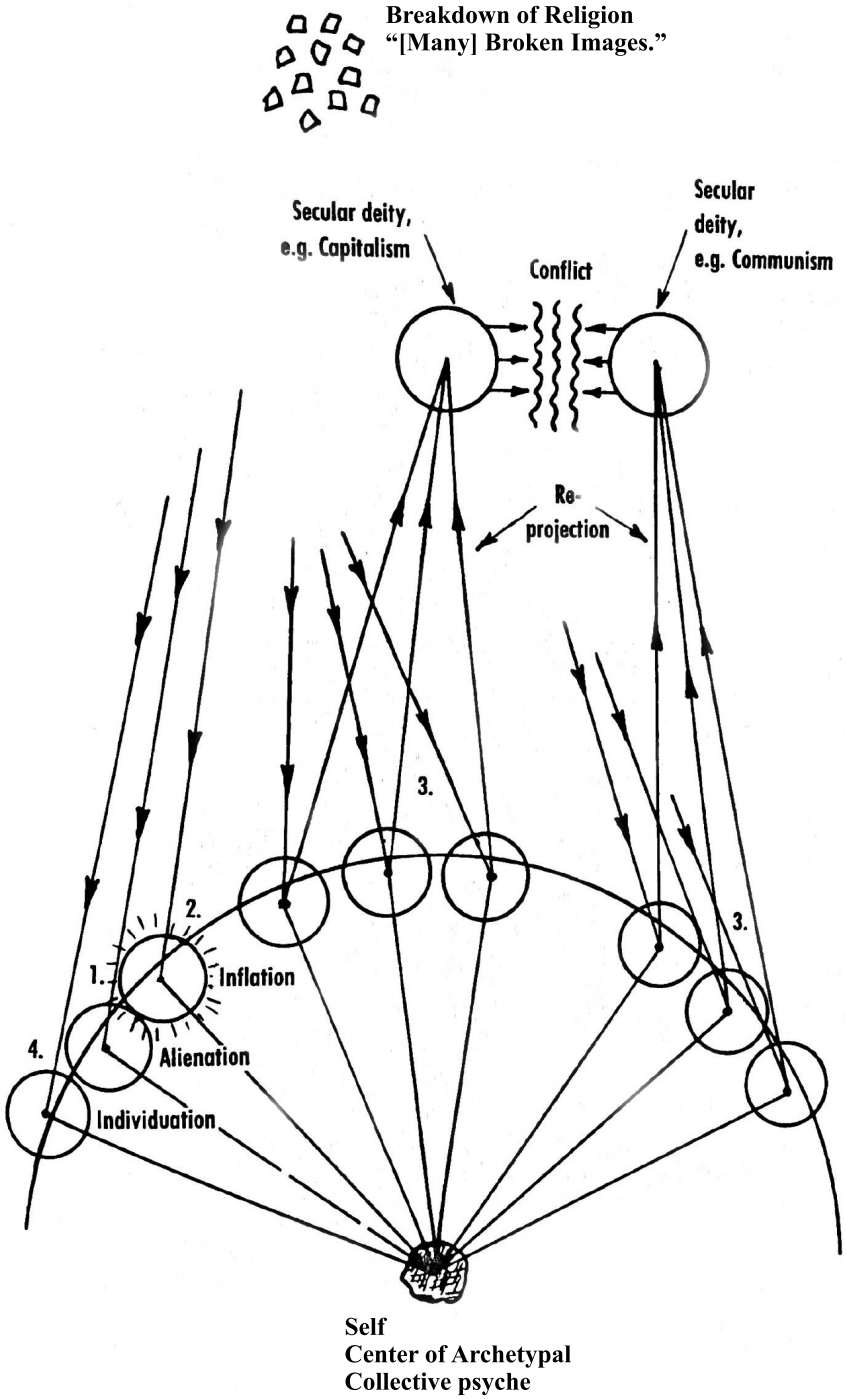


Figure 10: Breakdown of a religious projection.



**Our Religious Trauma**

My mother birthed me into a reality relevant to the displaced, disenfranchised, and dehumanized poor. Surviving and navigating the Christian *Amerikan* way of life. Like many children in New York Cities *Ghetto-poor* culture during the beginning of the 21st century, we were mentored and nourished by a struggling woman of color in *Amerika*: Theopoetically an image of *Sophia*[74] in the flesh. My mother was the primal relationship,[75] a feminine symbol encompassing the building blocks for existence, a *mother archetype*: a genderless interpersonal relationship[76] that provides nourishment, warmth, protection and tenderness in all areas of life.[77] Religiously a colonized Church is a colonized mother symbol: a home for the early stages of development in faith, it's the *Interpersonal Space* created by a mother symbol (a colonized Church) and their faith practitioners (colonized Children). However, when a human separates from their Theopoetic mother symbol like a colonized Church; what was hidden underneath the surface of our persona, now becomes exposed and felt: an unraveling of religious trauma.

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[74] Henry Corbin, et al., *Jung, Buddhism, and the Incarnation of Sophia: Unpublished Writings from the Philosopher of the Soul* (VT: Inner Traditions, 2019), 117. The idea of Sophia or divine wisdom (*Sapientia Dei),* a Spirit *(Pneuma)* of a feminine nature-we would say a coeternal hypostasis existing before Creation.

[75] Erich Neumann, *The Fear of the Feminine and Other Essays on Feminine Psychology* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4. Initially the unconscious appears as the good mother-that is, the child's primal relationship to her carries a positive accent, for the dependent, infantile ego is protected and nourished by the maternal unconscious.

[76] Ibid, 231. This means that the mother of the primal relationship, as the one who encompasses, contains, and directs life, is at the same time both *world*, and *Self* in one. -an archetypal, transpersonal position-no matter how the infant may experience her [Mother archetype] physically, she is objectively the surrounding world in which and from which it lives.

[77] Ibid, 230. The phenomenon of the primal relationship to the mother during the first year of life consists basically in this: even following its birth, the child lives in the mother as "something contained" and is totally dependent on the "positive elementary character" of the mother [The Great Mother archetype] as the one who provides nourishment, warmth, protection, and tenderness in all areas of its life.

My colonized *mother* attempted to be a good, colonized Christian and would recite Bible scriptures that empowered a fascist authority ordained by a colonized interpretation of God. Our *mother* loved to quote scripture by saying things like, "children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty the Lord." (Colossians 3:20-21 NRSV) So, when we didn't "obey" our *mother,* we were taught to understand that we were disobeying God. Many colonized Churches in Amerika have done a similar symbol association, instilling in the practitioners through revised doctrine, an absolute contradiction: to disobey the Church is to disobey God. Colonized Christianity has also created a criterion that is used by the world without question, a criterion that is religiously traumatizing and dehumanizing. This has brought unmeasurable religious trauma to our life because of how symbols like Jesus have been used. We recall at the age of seven years old, kneeling on rice in the nude while reading about Jesus: our Lord and Savior. A commonly crude punishment our *mother* enforced when she felt that we disobeyed her or God. The countless beatings and punishments given by my *mother* daily were attempts to live a good colonized Christian life and instill good colonized Christian obedient values; religious trauma imbedded its essence in the deepest layer of our Spirit and Flesh that cannot be ignored or forgotten.

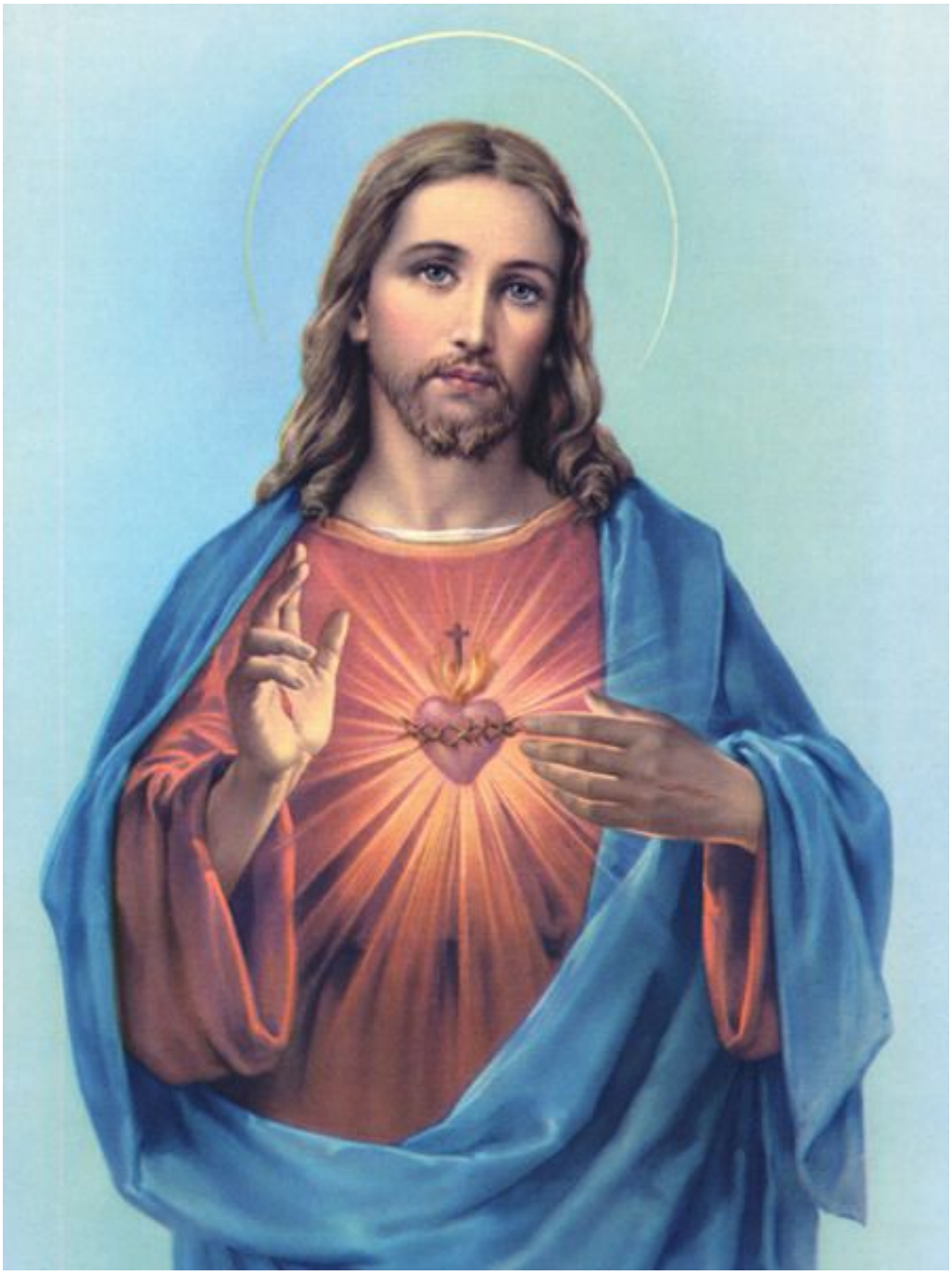
**Inner-Terrestrial Trauma**

We carry invisible scars as well as physical scars that act as reminders of what the colonized Church has done to us indirectly through our colonized *mother*. [Trauma] Jesus was a symbol found in most homes we went to, hanging above the entry door or in a frame hanging on the family wall. The only humans we saw who looked like Jesus based on the images in colonized Church (see Figure 11 & 12), were our teachers, police

officers and the people who managed the shelters: they were always in positions of power dictating what is decent or indecent. In our mind, Jesus was pale skinned with bright blue eyes and blondish golden hair who could be seen hanging around in Churches or in someone's home watching them from the wall or above the door. We grew up considering Jesus as the *Boogeyman*: the one who is always watching and waiting for you to be queerly indecent or untameably disobedient.

Figure 11: Portrait of Jesus Christ Painting by Dragan Cvetkovic Cvele.

Figure 12: The Sacred Heart of Jesus



A relationship of anxiety in our mind that correlated Jesus with a dark scary entity that is after us and if it gets us, we die. Jesus wasn't a symbol of liberation we wanted to embody, instead, Jesus was an oppressive symbol we hid from in shame like Adam hiding in shame from God (Genesis 3:8) because we knew we could never live up to the unrealistic symbolic value of a perfect Jesus: the begotten Son of God. Jesus symbolized a perfectly powerful slave master ordained by an absolutely colonized God; a sanctioned kidnapping and enslavement of humans justified by a colonized Christian doctrine. So, instead we yearned to be a symbol that felt like a well-oiled and broken in baseball glove: an extension of Self. As we strive to be in relationship with Self, we began developing questions that repeatedly evoked an absolute response from the colonized Church: "have faith." However, faith didn't explain the indescribable things happening inside us, we required an understanding of Self: a relational God. So, we started a journey of individuation to discover inner truth: Self. We began backpacking the shadow trails of our mind, mapping indescribable spaces and re-creating relationships with shadow symbols imprisoned by religious trauma.

As humans, we often are afraid of what we do not understand, we rarely establish relationships with dark things that are considered indecent, scary or sin. Instead, we are programmed by colonized religious doctrine to not feel safe outside "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." Perhaps fear is inevitably the lack of information that haunts us as humans. The late Liberation Theologian and Author, Howard Thurman contributes; "fear is one of the persistent hounds of hell that dog the footsteps of the poor, the dispossessed,

the disinherited."[78] We believe Thurman is articulating how fear is a constant part of our reality because it's the polar to knowing; a Theopoetic embodiment of religious trauma in the 21st Century.

We are conditioned to believe that we are safe in God's house, yet it's ironic how pain and suffering has made its way inside. The body of Christ (Creation) has been exposed to colonized interpretations of the gospels (good news) and Yeshua (the Jewish Black man murdered by an empire). This Theopoetic human poison has killed many and continues to religiously traumatize more. In relation to colonized Christianity, we are naturally indecent and queer because we don't realize that we have been stolen and put into an *old smelly box*: a synthetic environment that produces artificial meaning to maintain control over others. Due to Christianity being in relationship with colonization; it mimics what the other is doing until synergy is created. It's the synergy between Christianity and colonization that creates a religiously traumatizing space for human faith practitioners. Sometimes this space can even feel hopeless: an absence of God. However, even within the religiously *old smelly box* of colonized Christianity, God comes to a starving dreamer by means of a theophany:[79] relevant, restorative and revolutionary dreams that reimagine old symbols to give new meanings with the intention of liberation. As a Shaman journeying with religiously traumatized humans, we exist within an Amerikan dream: "[a colonized] Christian nation in which [were Theopoetically] segregated, lynched and burned."[80] We're experiencing a nightmare that we cannot easily

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[78] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 26.
[79] When a dreamer experiences God or a form of God in their dream.
[80] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 4.

wake from, but no less a Dream: a plain of existence beyond and between time and space: where God can be perceived in a relatively unimaginable way.

Finally, religiously traumatized millennials Theopoetically symbolize a "cultural longing for love."[81] "Mother Teresa observes, the greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved and uncared for."[82] Theopoetically, colonized Christianity has incubated a religious parasite that feeds on the unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. As someone who was birthed out of the disenfranchised, dislocated, and dehumanized poor: we are molded by our experiences with a colonized Christianity in Amerika. We unrealistically expected the Church: God's body of people, to love and care for us; to be abused, raped, starved, and lied to by a Theopoetic mother symbol like a colonized Church, has irreversibly affected us physically, psychologically and spiritually. We wish to love and care for Self, so that we may be whole enough to help others do the same beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." By creating Between | Space's, we aim to begin healing religious trauma for other's and our Self.

[81] Seel, Jr., *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church*, 173.
[82] Ibid.

# Chapter 3: Foundational Thoughts & Inquiries

## Introduction

At the heart of our religious trauma project lies an unwavering commitment to unraveling the complexities that intertwine spirituality, trauma, and healing. The three foundational research questions serve as beacons guiding our expedition into the uncharted territories of the human psyche, beckoning us to explore the profound implications of God's mysterious influence on our collective consciousness. Through this multi-faith journey, we have come to view these inquiries not merely as academic pursuits but as a Theopoetically spiritual invitation. It is an exploration that transcends traditional research boundaries, diving into the realms of the sacred and the profane, the known and the unknown. Much like a spiritual odyssey, we navigate the inner abyss of humanity's potential for healing and community, recognizing that the answers we seek are not confined to the empirical, but also reside within the realm of the ineffable. As we venture further, we embrace the intersectionality of spirituality, theology, and psychology; intertwining the threads of faith and trauma to weave a tapestry of understanding. This project is more than an intellectual endeavor; it is a call to action, a collective endeavor to shed light on the shadows cast by religious trauma and to foster a space for communal healing and understanding.

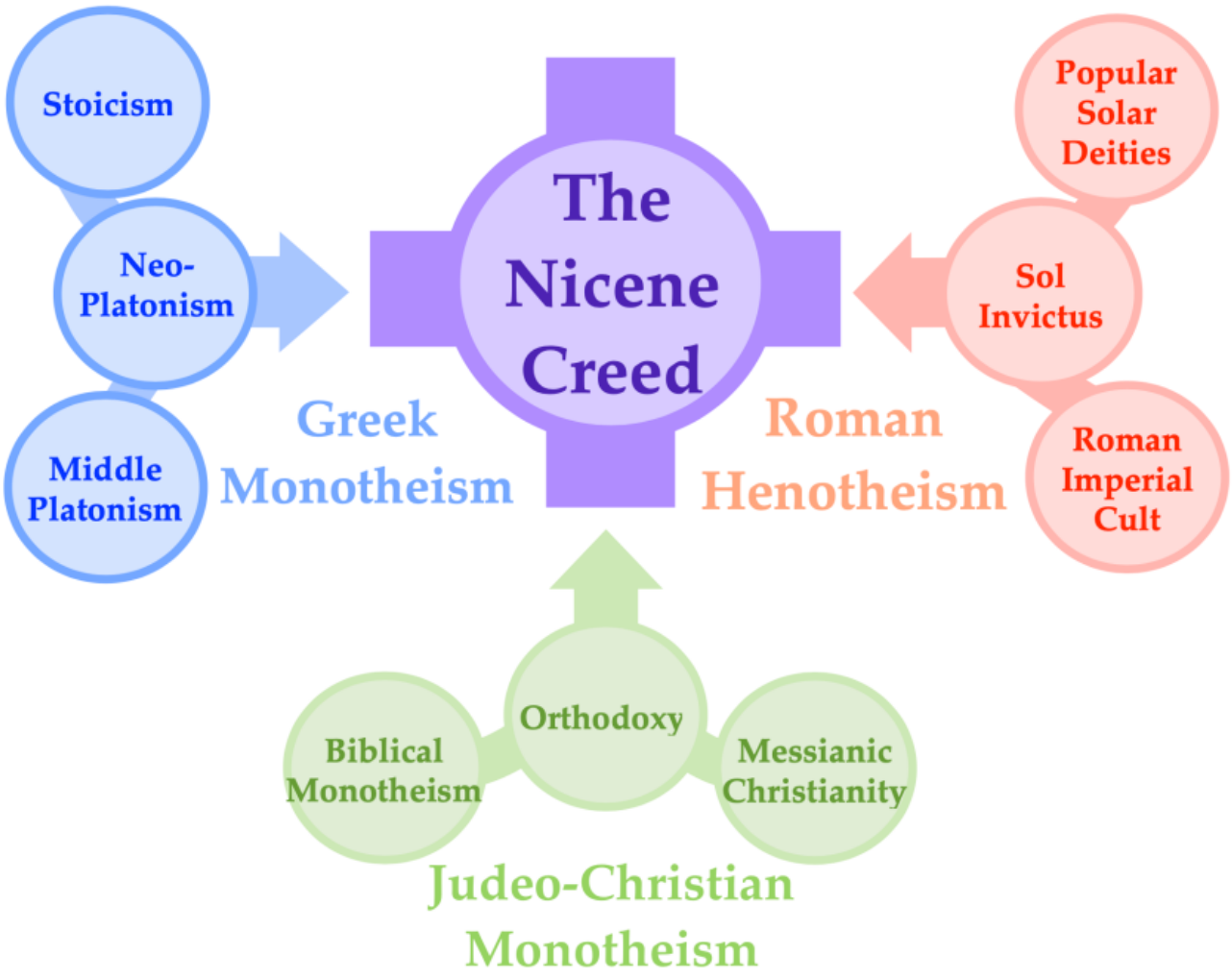
In this Theopoetic exploration, we are challenged to redefine notions of divinity and examine the transformative power of spirituality in the face of adversity. It is an inquiry into the very essence of our shared human experience, where the sacred and the secular converge, inviting us to reconsider the narratives that shape our understanding of Self, community, and the Divine. Through this multi-faith approach, our religious trauma project aspires not only to answer the questions posed but also to spark a dialogue that transcends traditional religious doctrine, fostering a deeper connection between spirituality, trauma, and healing. In doing so, we hope to illuminate a path toward healing, empathy, and a more inclusive understanding of the profound impact of religious trauma on the human soul.

**Research Question #1**

**If the Church is community, how has the Church been modeled and who is this community modeled for? What does community look like when tailored to millennials experiencing religious trauma in the 21st century?**

The Nicene Creed (see figure 13), formulated during the First Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., played a crucial role in defining Christian beliefs and solidifying the Church's doctrinal foundation. This council, convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine I, aimed to address theological controversies and establish a unified understanding of Christian doctrine. The Bishop of Rome, who came to be known as the Pope (El Papa), gradually gained prominence as a central figure in the Church's leadership. The papacy became a symbol of unity and authority for the Christian community.

Figure 13: The Marriage of Three Monotheisms



It's important to note that the development of the Catholic[83] Church was a complex historical process that unfolded over centuries. While the events described in the Second Testament provide the foundation, the institutionalization and formalization of the Church's structure occurred gradually in response to theological challenges, doctrinal disputes, and the need for organizational cohesion. The concept of the Church as a community has evolved over time, and its modeling can vary significantly based on politics, religious tradition, control & power, cultural context, and the needs of the community it serves (see figure 13). In general, the Church is seen as a place where individuals come together to worship, support one another, and live out their faith. It is often seen as a spiritual family where members can find belonging, fellowship, and a sense of purpose. Historically, the Church has been modeled in various ways, including:

**Traditional Denominational Model**

In many traditional Christian denominations, the Church is organized into local congregations, each with its own clergy, rituals, and traditions. These Churches often have a hierarchical structure, with a central authority overseeing multiple congregations. The community is defined by shared religious beliefs and practices. The traditional denominational model is a common organizational structure in many Christian denominations. Here are some key features of the traditional denominational model:

[83] The term "Catholic" itself means "universal," reflecting the Church's mission to spread the teachings of Yeshua to all people.

A. **Local Congregations:** The basic unit of the Church is the local congregation, which consists of a group of believers who gather for worship, fellowship, and religious activities. Each congregation typically has its own physical Church building and is led by a clergy or a pastor.

B. **Clergy:** The clergy, including pastors, priests, and other religious leaders, play a central role in guiding the spiritual life of the congregation. They often lead worship services, administer sacraments or ordinances, and provide pastoral care to the members.

C. **Rituals & Traditions:** Each denomination within this model tends to have its own set of rituals, liturgies, and traditions that define its religious practices. These rituals often include sacraments like baptism and communion, as well as specific rites/rituals for various life events.

D. **Hierarchical Structure:** Many denominations have a hierarchical structure, where there is a central authority or governing body overseeing multiple congregations. This hierarchy may include regional or national levels of organization, and decisions may be made at these higher levels that affect local congregations.

E. **Shared Beliefs:** The community is bound together by a set of shared religious beliefs and doctrines. These beliefs serve as a unifying force and help define the identity of the denomination.

F. **Central Authority:** The denominational model often involves a central authority, such as a bishop, or a governing council, which provides leadership, guidance, and oversight to the entire denomination. This

authority may set doctrinal standards, make decisions on theological matters, and address broader issues affecting the denomination.

G. It's important to note that while this traditional model is prevalent, there are variations across denominations, and some Christian groups may organize themselves differently. For example, some denominations may have a more congregationalist structure, where each local congregation is autonomous and self-governing, while others may have a more centralized authority. The specific practices and beliefs can vary widely among Christian denominations.

**Non-Denominational & Independent Models**

Some Churches do not align with a specific denomination and operate independently. They often have a more flexible structure and may emphasize contemporary worship styles, community engagement, and a focus on individual relationships with God. Non-denominational and independent Churches are indeed characterized by their lack of affiliation with a specific religious denomination. These Churches often operate autonomously, without being governed by a larger organizational structure. Here are some key features and characteristics of non-denominational and independent Church models:

A. **Autonomy:** Non-denominational Churches are independent and autonomous, meaning they are not governed by the doctrines, policies, or hierarchy of a larger denomination. This autonomy allows them to have more flexibility in their beliefs, practices, and decision-making processes.

B. **Contemporary Worship Styles:** Many non-denominational Churches emphasize contemporary worship styles, incorporating modern music, technology, and multimedia presentations into their services. This can create a more dynamic and engaging worship experience, appealing to a diverse audience, particularly younger generations.

C. **Community Engagement:** Non-denominational Churches often place a strong emphasis on community engagement and outreach. They may actively seek to address the needs of the local community through social programs, charity work, and other initiatives. This focus on community can foster a sense of belonging and purpose among members.

D. **Individual Relationships with God:** Non-denominational Churches often prioritize the individual's relationship with God. They may encourage personal spiritual growth, prayer, and a direct connection to God without the intermediary structure often present in denominational Churches. However, it's important to note that colonized theologies (*absolute-pure-chosen* rituals of thinking and interpreting of God) can still be in effect in the background. Meaning, even though there is a focus on a relationship with God; how that God is interpreted and possibly weaponized, can contribute to religious trauma.

E. **Doctrinal Flexibility:** These Churches may exhibit a range of beliefs and practices, as they are not bound by a specific denominational creed. This can lead to a diversity of theological perspectives among congregants,

with the core focus often being on essential Christian beliefs rather than denominational specifics.

F. **Informal Leadership Structure:** Non-denominational Churches may have a more informal leadership structure compared to denominational Churches. Leadership roles may be filled by pastors, elders, or other individuals recognized for their spiritual leadership rather than a hierarchical appointment from a larger governing body.

G. **Focus on Relevant Teaching:** Independent Churches often aim for teaching that is relevant to everyday life. Sermons and teachings may be designed to address current issues, practical challenges, and the application of biblical principles to contemporary situations.

It's important to note that the term "non-denominational" can encompass a wide range of beliefs and practices, and each Church may have its unique approach. Some non-denominational Churches may still share similarities with certain denominations, while others may intentionally distance themselves from traditional denominational structures.

**Online Communities**

With the increase of global pandemics starting in 2021 due to the outbreak of multiple virus variants of Covid-19, humanity had to endure and adapt to enforced isolation, fear of killing another by being within six feet of each other and the increase in utilizing social media; many Churches have established online communities. These communities can be an extension of physical congregations or exist solely in the digital space, allowing people to connect and engage in worship and discussions regardless of geographic location. The emergence of online communities for religious groups,

including Churches, has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. The integration of technology and the internet into religious practices have opened new avenues for people to connect, engage, and participate in their faith communities. Here are some key points regarding the rise of online communities for Churches:

A. **Accessibility & Inclusivity:** Online communities break down geographical barriers, enabling individuals to participate in religious activities regardless of their location. This inclusivity is particularly important for those who may be unable to attend physical services due to health issues, travel constraints, or other reasons.
B. **Virtual Worship Services:** Churches often host virtual worship services, allowing members to watch or participate in religious ceremonies from the comfort of their homes. This has been especially significant during times of lockdowns and restrictions, such as those imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic.
C. **Digital Fellowship & Support:** Online platforms provide spaces for members to connect and support each other digitally. Whether through forums, chat groups, or social media platforms, individuals can share their experiences, prayer requests, and words of encouragement (digital discipleship).
D. **Flexible Engagement:** Digital communities offer flexibility in terms of timing and participation. Members can engage in discussions, Bible studies, or prayer sessions at times that suit their schedules, fostering a sense of community even in the absence of physical presence.

E. **Integration of Multimedia:** Churches often leverage multimedia elements, such as livestreams, podcasts, and video content, to enhance the online worship experience as well as recruitment/conversion. This allows for a dynamic and visually engaging way to convey religious teachings and messages.

F. **Youth & Tech-Savvy Congregations:** Younger generations, who are often more tech-savvy, find online communities a natural extension of their digital lives. This facilitates the involvement of youth in religious activities and community building.

G. **Challenges & Considerations:** While online communities offer numerous benefits, there are also challenges, such as the potential for online divisions, the loss of a physical sense of community, and the need to address issues related to privacy and security. This can add to a person's religious trauma.

H. **Hybrid Models:** Some Churches adopt a hybrid approach, combining physical and online elements to create a comprehensive community experience. This allows for both in-person interactions and the advantages of digital connectivity.

In conclusion, the establishment of online communities has become a vital component of modern religious practices, offering a means for individuals to connect, worship, and share their faith in ways that were not possible before The Digital Age/ Pandemic Age (in the 21st Century). This trend is likely to continue evolving as technology advances and societies adapt to new ways of community building. When it comes to tailoring the

concept of community to millennials experiencing religious trauma in the 21st century, it's important to consider their unique needs and concerns. Religious trauma can result from negative experiences within religious institutions or due to personal conflicts with faith. To create a supportive, healing, and multi-faith community for religiously traumatized individuals, the following approaches should be considered:

**Inclusivity & Openness**

Emphasize inclusivity and openness, where individuals are accepted regardless of their past religious experiences or beliefs. Create a non-judgmental space where people can share their trauma and doubts without fear of rejection. By embracing inclusivity and openness, rigid thoughts and beliefs like Christian doctrine must become flexible or else it will break and not serve humans embracing inclusivity and openness. Fostering a culture of genuine curiosity and respectful dialogue, encouraging individuals to explore diverse perspectives and challenge their own preconceptions. Provide resources for education and Self-discovery, promoting understanding rather than imposing rigid doctrines. In this environment, people can grow personally and spiritually, transcending divisive ideologies and finding common ground based on shared values and humanity. Encourage a spirit of empathy and compassion, recognizing that everyone's journey is unique, and that personal growth often involves questioning and evolving beliefs. In doing so, we cultivate a community that not only tolerates differences but actively celebrates the richness they bring to our collective tapestry of faith and understanding.

**Mental Health Support**

Provide resources and support for mental health and healing. This may include access to counseling services, support groups, and educational programs on religious trauma. Additionally, implement initiatives that promote mindfulness practices, stress management techniques, and workshops on building resilience. Create a safe and inclusive space where individuals can openly discuss their mental health concerns, reducing stigma and encouraging a sense of community. Consider partnerships with mental health professionals, organizations, and advocates to enhance the range and effectiveness of available support services.

**Secular & Multi-faith Options**

Offer both secular and Multi-faith perspectives to cater to a diverse range of beliefs and backgrounds. This approach acknowledges that people may have different spiritual journeys and that their spiritual or philosophical beliefs may change over time. In addition to providing Secular & Multi-faith Options, it is crucial to create an inclusive and respectful environment where individuals feel empowered to explore, express, and evolve their beliefs. Encourage open dialogue and understanding, fostering a community that embraces diversity and promotes a sense of belonging. This not only enriches the spiritual experience for individuals but also contributes to a more harmonious and tolerant society. By acknowledging the fluidity of spiritual journeys and the potential for evolving beliefs, we foster a culture that respects the uniqueness of each individual's path, creating a space where personal growth and Self-discovery are valued.

**Online & Offline Communities**

Consider hybrid models that combine physical and online communities to accommodate diverse needs and preferences. Online spaces can offer anonymity and convenience for those who may be hesitant to attend in-person gatherings. Additionally, leveraging the strengths of both online and offline communities can foster a more inclusive and accessible environment. Online platforms enable global reach, breaking down geographical barriers and allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to connect and collaborate. Offline interactions, on the other hand, provide a tangible and immersive experience, fostering deeper connections and a sense of community.

Furthermore, hybrid models can enhance engagement by offering flexibility in participation. Participants can choose between attending physical events or engaging virtually, catering to various comfort levels and circumstances. This adaptability not only accommodates different preferences but also ensures that community-building efforts remain resilient in the face of unforeseen challenges, such as health crises or travel restrictions. In essence, embracing a hybrid approach to community building combines the best of both online and offline worlds, promoting inclusivity, accessibility, and adaptability for a dynamic and thriving community ecosystem.

**Education & Reconciliation**

Promote education and dialogue about religious trauma, its causes, and potential paths to healing and reconciliation. Provide opportunities for individuals to explore their faith or spirituality in a supportive environment. Fostering multi-faith understanding and

cooperation by organizing events that facilitate open conversations, promote empathy, and break down stereotypes. Encourage the development of inclusive curricula that incorporate diverse religious perspectives, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of various belief systems. Support initiatives that aim to address systemic issues contributing to religious trauma, such as discrimination or exclusionary practices, and advocate for policies that promote religious freedom and tolerance. Empower communities to create safe spaces for survivors of religious trauma, offering resources and support networks for those navigating their healing journey. Ultimately, strive for a society that values and celebrates diversity of thought, fostering an environment where individuals can coexist harmoniously despite differing religious beliefs.

**Empowerment & Autonomy**

Encourage individuals to take control of their spiritual journeys and make choices that align with their values and experiences. Avoid pressuring anyone into conformity. Promoting a culture of inclusivity and respect, recognizes that diversity enriches our spiritual being. Foster an environment where differing beliefs and perspectives are embraced, fostering open-mindedness and constructive dialogue. Prioritize active listening and empathy, valuing each person's unique path while providing support and guidance when sought. Uphold the principles of empowerment and autonomy by respecting the autonomy of others and refraining from imposing personal beliefs. Ultimately, strive to create a space where individuals feel free to explore, grow, and express their spirituality authentically. The goal is to create an environment that is empathetic, understanding, and adaptive to the specific needs of millennials or anyone who has experienced religious trauma. It's about facilitating a healing process and

providing a sense of belonging and support, while respecting the diversity of beliefs and experiences within the community.

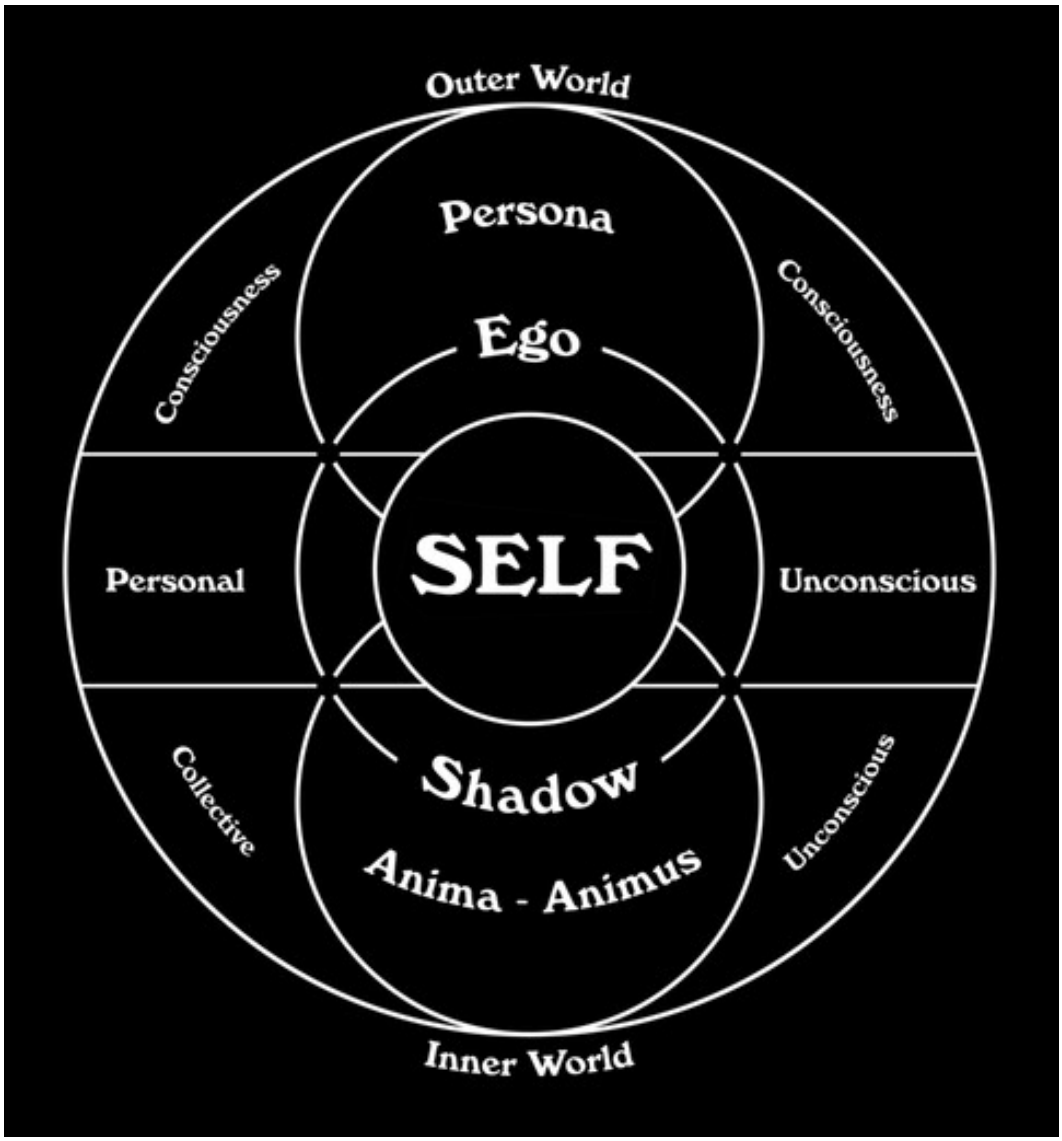
**Research Question #2**

**How can Carl Jung's idea of Self and individuation in and through film, help millennials develop meta-modern myths that introduce as well as stimulate healing and Self-development?**

The late Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, developed a comprehensive theory of personality that included the concept of the Self.[84] According to Jung, the Self is a central and unifying archetype within the human psyche. It represents the totality of the individual's conscious and unconscious elements and serves as an organizing principle for personal growth and integration (see figure 14).

[84] Sharp, *JUNG LEXICON: A Primer of Terms & Concepts*, 73. [Self] The archetype of wholeness and the regulating center of the psyche; a transpersonal power that transcends the ego. As an empirical concept, the self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. It expresses the unity of the personality as a whole. But in so far as the total personality, on account of its unconscious component, can be only in part conscious, the concept of the self is, in part, only potentially empirical and is to that extent a postulate. In other words, it encompasses both the experienceable and the inexperienceable (or the not yet experienced). It is a transcendental concept, for it presupposes the existence of unconscious factors on empirical grounds and thus characterizes an entity that can be described only in part. ["Definitions," CW 6, par. 789.]

Figure 14: The Self According to Carl G. Jung



**Archetypal Nature**

The Self is considered an archetype, which means it is a universal, symbolic image or pattern that is present in the collective unconscious of all humans. Archetypes are fundamental elements of human experience that shape our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (see figure 14). Archetypes play a crucial role in shaping human thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. They provide a template for understanding and interpreting the world around us, influencing our perceptions and responses to various life situations. By exploring and integrating archetypal elements, individuals can gain insight into their own psychological dynamics, fostering personal growth and Self-awareness. [Empowerment & Autonomy] Encouraging individuals to take control of their spiritual journeys involves promoting a sense of empowerment and autonomy. This approach recognizes that each person's path is unique, and spiritual growth is a highly individualized process. It emphasizes the importance of making conscious choices that align with one's values, experiences, and personal understanding of spirituality. Empowerment in the context of spirituality means providing individuals with the tools, knowledge, and support they need to navigate their own journeys. This might involve facilitating Self-reflection, offering diverse perspectives, and fostering an environment where individuals feel free to explore their beliefs without judgment.

Autonomy, in this context, underscores the importance of respecting individual agency and avoiding coercive or prescriptive approaches to spirituality. People should be free to choose their own beliefs, practices, and paths without feeling pressured to conform to external expectations. This approach recognizes that spirituality is a deeply personal and evolving aspect of the Self, and individuals should have the freedom to

shape their spiritual narratives in ways that resonate with their innermost convictions. In essence, the interplay between the archetypal nature of the Self and the principles of empowerment and autonomy creates a framework for a rich and diverse spiritual landscape. By understanding and embracing the universal symbols embedded in the collective unconscious, individuals can embark on authentic spiritual journeys that empower them to make choices reflective of their unique identities and values, free from undue external influence or conformity.

**Integration of Opposites**

Jung believed that the Self is characterized by the integration of opposites, including conscious and unconscious elements, as well as various personality traits and aspects of one's identity. This process of integration, known as “individuation,” is crucial for achieving psychological and spiritual wholeness. The concept of the "Integration of Opposites" is a fundamental idea in Carl Jung's analytical psychology. Jung posited that the goal of human development is the realization and integration of the Self, which he considered to be the central organizing principle of the psyche. The Self represents a transcendent and unifying force that encompasses both conscious and unconscious aspects of an individual's personality.

1. **Conscious & Unconscious Integration:**
    - **Conscious Elements:** These are aspects of the psyche that are within our awareness, such as thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. They are the elements we actively engage with in our daily lives.

- **Unconscious Elements:** Jung emphasized the importance of the unconscious mind, which includes repressed memories, instincts, and archetypal symbols. Integrating these unconscious elements into consciousness is essential for achieving a balanced and whole psyche.

2. **Personality Traits Integration:**

    - **Persona and Shadow:** Jung introduced the concepts of persona (the social mask we wear) and shadow (the Unconscious, hidden aspects of ourselves). Integrating the shadow involves acknowledging and incorporating those aspects of ourselves that we might find uncomfortable or unacceptable.

    - **Anima/Animus Integration:** The anima represents the feminine qualities within a man's psyche, and the animus represents the masculine qualities within a woman's psyche. Integrating these aspects involves recognizing and embracing both the feminine and masculine dimensions within oneself.

3. **Individuation Process:**

    - **Definition:** Individuation is the lifelong process of psychological growth and Self-discovery, leading to the integration of various psychological opposites.

    - **Stages of Individuation:** This process involves navigating through different stages of Self-awareness, confronting inner conflicts, and gradually achieving a harmonious and balanced personality.

- **Symbolism:** Jung often used symbols and archetypes to describe the transformative journey of individuation. The mandala, for example, is a symbol of the Self and represents the integration of opposites within a unified whole.

4. **Psychological & Spiritual Wholeness:**

    - **Psychological Wholeness:** Integrating opposites contributes to psychological/spiritual health by reducing inner conflicts, fostering Self-acceptance, and promoting a sense of completeness.

    - **Spiritual Wholeness:** Jung believed that individuation goes beyond psychological well-being and has spiritual implications. The realization of the Self connects individuals to a deeper, transpersonal dimension, providing a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

In essence, the integration of opposites, as conceptualized by Jung, is a multifaceted process that involves reconciling conscious and unconscious elements, embracing diverse personality traits, and undergoing a transformative journey toward individuation. This process is not only essential for psychological health but also holds profound implications for spiritual development and a holistic sense of Self.

**Mandala Symbolism**

Jung often used the symbol of the mandala to represent the Self. A mandala is a geometric pattern that represents the unity of opposites and the totality of the psyche. Creating or meditating on mandalas is seen as a therapeutic practice that can facilitate the process of individuation. Jung often utilized the mandala to symbolize the Self, a central

concept in his psychological framework. The Self, in Jungian psychology, represents the unification of the conscious and unconscious aspects of an individual, signifying the totality of one's psyche. The mandala, with its intricate geometric design and balance, mirrors the integration of opposites within the Self, such as the conscious and unconscious, masculine, and feminine, or light and dark aspects of the psyche.

The act of creating or meditating on mandalas is considered by Jungian therapists and practitioners as a therapeutic tool for Self-exploration and psychological healing. Engaging in mandala-making allows individuals to tap into their creative and intuitive capacities, fostering a connection with the deeper layers of the unconscious mind. The process of constructing a mandala can be a form of active imagination, a concept in Jungian psychology where the individual engages with symbolic images to access unconscious material. The therapeutic benefits of mandala work extend beyond the creative process itself. By expressing inner conflicts and harmonizing opposing elements through the mandala, individuals may experience a sense of inner balance and resolution. The repetitive and meditative nature of creating a mandala also contributes to a state of mindfulness, promoting relaxation and stress reduction. In this way, the mandala serves as a symbolic pathway to Self-discovery and personal transformation.

Moreover, the mandala's universal nature transcends cultural boundaries, making it a symbol that resonates across diverse societies and spiritual traditions. Its prevalence in various forms and contexts underscores its timeless significance as a representation of the archetypal journey towards wholeness. Jung's exploration of mandala symbolism has left an indelible mark on the field of psychology, influencing therapeutic practices that

embrace the profound interplay between symbolism, creativity, and the individuation process.

**Transcendence**

The Self transcends the individual ego and is connected to a larger, transpersonal dimension. It goes beyond the personal and taps into the collective unconscious, which contains shared symbols, myths, and archetypes that are part of the human experience. At its core, transcendence involves moving beyond the limitations of the ego, which is the part of the psyche that defines one's sense of Self and individual identity. Instead of being solely preoccupied with personal desires, fears, and experiences, the transcendent Self recognizes a deeper connection to a shared, collective experience that transcends individual boundaries.

One key aspect of this transcendent experience is the connection to the collective unconscious, a concept introduced by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. The collective unconscious is a reservoir of universal symbols, myths, and archetypes that are innate to the human experience. These elements are not learned or acquired through personal experience but are rather inherited and shared across cultures and generations. When an individual taps into the Collective Unconscious, they access a rich tapestry of symbols and archetypes that have been woven into the fabric of human consciousness over time. Archetypes, in this context, represent fundamental symbols or themes that recur in myths, stories, and dreams across cultures. Examples include the hero, the mother, the shadow, and the wise old man. By transcending the personal ego and connecting to the Collective Unconscious, individuals may encounter and embody these archetypes in their own

unique ways. This can lead to a sense of shared human experience, emphasizing commonalities and shared themes that unite people beyond superficial differences.

Transcendence is often associated with spiritual and mystical experiences, where individuals report a sense of unity with something greater than themselves. This might be described as a connection to a higher power, the cosmos, or a universal consciousness. Such experiences can bring about a profound shift in one's perspective, fostering a greater sense of meaning, purpose, and interconnectedness. In essence, the concept of transcendence involves a departure from the narrow confines of individual ego and an embrace of a larger, transpersonal dimension. This journey entails tapping into the collective unconscious, with its shared symbols and archetypes, and experiencing a sense of connection to something greater than the self. Through transcendence, individuals may find a deeper understanding of their place in the broader tapestry of human existence.

**Wholeness & Harmony**

The Self is associated with a sense of wholeness and harmony. As individuals move toward greater self-awareness and integration, they experience a more balanced and authentic sense of Self. This journey involves acknowledging and embracing both the light and dark aspects of the psyche. In the pursuit of greater Self-awareness, individuals recognize that the Self is not a static or one-dimensional entity; rather, it is a dynamic and multifaceted tapestry of thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Wholeness in this context implies a holistic approach to the self, wherein all aspects are acknowledged and embraced without judgment or rejection.

Harmony, on the other hand, signifies the equilibrium achieved through the integration of contrasting elements within the self. This integration involves not only acknowledging the light aspects, such as strengths, virtues, and positive experiences, but also confronting and accepting the shadow aspects—those darker and less explored dimensions that may encompass fears, insecurities, and unresolved traumas. The journey toward wholeness and harmony is a transformative process that requires Self-reflection, introspection, and a willingness to explore the depths of one's own psyche. It involves transcending the dichotomy of good and bad, positive, and negative, and recognizing the inherent complexity of human nature. By embracing both the light and dark aspects, individuals attain a more authentic and balanced sense of Self. This transformative journey is not linear but rather cyclical, as individuals may revisit and reassess different aspects of themselves throughout their lives. It is through this ongoing process of self-discovery and integration that individuals cultivate resilience, authenticity, and a deep sense of inner peace. Ultimately, the quest for wholeness and harmony contributes to a more enriched and fulfilling life, fostering a greater connection not only with oneself but also with the world and others.

**Teleological Nature**

The process of individuation, guided by the Self, is seen as teleological, meaning it has a purpose or goal. Jung believed that individuals are naturally driven toward Self-realization, and the Self serves as a guiding force in this developmental process. Understanding and integrating the Self is a central aspect of Jungian psychology, and it involves exploring the depths of the unconscious, confronting inner conflicts, and fostering a conscious relationship with the symbolic aspects of the psyche. The journey

toward the Self is ongoing and can lead to greater Self-awareness, authenticity, and a more fulfilling life. Individuation can provide a valuable framework for understanding how millennials and religiously traumatized people can develop meta-modern myths through film that introduce and stimulate healing and Self-development. Here are some ways in which this can be achieved:

**Self-Discovery & Integration**

Individuation, as proposed by Jung, is the process of becoming one's true and unique Self. Religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analyst can use this concept to create narratives where characters undergo a journey of Self-discovery and integration. Millennials and religiously traumatized people can relate to characters who face and overcome their own internal conflicts, inspiring them to embark on their own individuation journeys. Individuation, as proposed by Jung, is the process of becoming one's true and unique Self. Religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analysts can use this concept to create narratives where characters undergo a profound journey of Self-discovery and integration. By weaving the principles of individuation into storytelling, characters grapple with their inner conflicts, confront the shadows within, and ultimately embrace the totality of their being. This powerful narrative tool not only resonates with millennials and those who have experienced religious trauma but also serves as a universal theme that can connect with a diverse audience. The struggles and triumphs of characters navigating their individuation journeys become a mirror reflecting the complexities of the human experience (see figure 14).

Through the lens of Jungian psychology, these narratives offer a roadmap for personal growth and transformation. They showcase the importance of acknowledging

and embracing one's authentic Self, fostering a sense of empowerment and resilience in the face of internal and external challenges. By identifying with characters who undergo the process of individuation, individuals may find inspiration to embark on their own paths of Self-discovery, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. In the hands of skilled storytellers, the concept of individuation becomes a catalyst for profound narratives that explore the depths of the human psyche, offering not only entertainment but also a therapeutic and enlightening experience for religiously traumatized people.

**Archetypal Characters & Themes**

Jung's theory of archetypes[85] offers a rich source of material for creating characters and themes that resonate with the collective unconscious. Religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analyst can tap into these archetypes to create stories that resonate deeply, invoking a sense of connection to universal human experiences. Jung's theory of archetypes dives into the collective unconscious, revealing fundamental, recurring symbols and patterns that transcend cultural boundaries. This profound insight provides storytellers, particularly those exploring themes of religious trauma or engaging in Theo-Film analysis, with a powerful toolkit to craft narratives that transcend individual experiences and speak to the shared aspects of the human psyche. Archetypal characters,

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[83] Sharp, *JUNG LEXICON: A Primer of Terms & Concepts*, 13. [Archetypes] Primordial, structural elements of the human psyche. Archetypes are systems of readiness for action, and at the same time images and emotions. They are inherited with the brain structure-indeed they are its psychic aspect. They represent, on the one hand, a very strong instinctive conservatism, while on the other hand they are the most effective means conceivable of instinctive adaptation. They are thus, essentially, the chthonic portion of the psyche; that portion through which the psyche is attached to nature. ["Mind and Earth," CW 10, par. 53.]

such as the Hero, the Shadow, the Wise Old Man (Magician), and the Anima/Animus, serve as vessels for universal truths and themes. These characters embody fundamental human struggles, desires, and conflicts, allowing writers to tap into a wellspring of emotional resonance. By harnessing archetypes, storytellers can create narratives that resonate on a deep, symbolic level, fostering a connection between the audience and the timeless themes embedded in the collective unconscious.

Themes rooted in archetypes offer a way to explore the complexities of religious trauma and Theo-Film analysis with a broader and more profound perspective. The Hero's journey, for example, can symbolize the quest for personal and spiritual transformation, mirroring the struggles of those navigating religious trauma. The Shadow archetype may represent the darker, repressed aspects of the human psyche, providing a nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by individuals wrestling with the aftermath of religious trauma. Incorporating Jungian archetypes into storytelling allows for a richer exploration of the human condition, providing a framework to address profound questions about identity, meaning, and the interplay between the sacred and the profane. By weaving these archetypal threads into the narrative fabric, people can create stories that not only entertain but also resonate on a deeper level, inviting people to reflect on their own journeys and the universal aspects of the human experience.

**Shadow Exploration**

The idea of the Shadow,[86] a repressed or hidden aspect of one's personality, is central to Jung's work. Films can explore the shadow side of characters, demonstrating the importance of acknowledging and integrating these dark aspects of the Self. This can inspire religiously traumatized people to confront their own shadows and work towards healing and Self-development. Shadow Exploration in film dives into the intricate layers of the human psyche, presenting characters as complex entities shaped by both light and darkness. Just as Jung emphasized the significance of acknowledging the shadow, filmmakers leverage this concept to offer audiences a mirror to their own suppressed dimensions. The cinematic portrayal of the shadow is not merely an artistic choice; it serves as a catalyst for introspection and personal growth. Through the lens of the shadow, films become a powerful medium for individuals who have experienced religious trauma. These narratives not only validate the existence of shadows but also provide a roadmap for confronting and reconciling with them. In doing so, they become a source of empowerment for those navigating the challenging journey of Self-discovery.

Furthermore, Shadow Exploration in cinema transcends the confines of individual characters, extending its impact to societal and cultural shadows. By addressing collective repressions and hidden facets, films can stimulate conversations about broader issues, fostering a collective consciousness that is attuned to the multifaceted nature of

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[86] Sharp, *JUNG LEXICON: A Primer of Terms & Concepts,* 76. [Shadow] Hidden or unconscious aspects of oneself, both good and bad, which the ego has either repressed or never recognized. (See also repression.) The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. ["The Shadow," CW 9ii, par. 14.]

human existence. In essence, the cinematic exploration of the shadow is a transformative experience, inviting viewers to embrace the totality of their being and encouraging a profound journey towards healing, Self-awareness, and the realization of their full potential.

**Symbolism & Imagery**

Jung believed that symbols and imagery have a profound impact on the unconscious mind.[87] Religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analyst can use symbolism and imagery to convey deeper, psychological truths, providing a rich source of material for Self-reflection and exploration. Symbolism and imagery serve as powerful vehicles for exploring the depths of the unconscious, allowing individuals to connect with archetypal elements that resonate across cultures and time periods. Carl Jung, a prominent figure in analytical psychology, emphasized the universality of symbols and their ability to tap into the collective unconscious—a reservoir of shared human experiences and symbols inherited from our ancestors. For those who have experienced religious trauma, symbolism can offer a means of reclaiming personal narrative and fostering healing. The use of symbols and imagery in religious contexts can act as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious, facilitating a reevaluation of one's beliefs and experiences. This process can be particularly potent in Theo-Film analysis, where the

[87] Ibid, 90. [Unconscious] The totality of all psychic phenomena that lack the quality of consciousness. (See also collective unconscious and personal unconscious.) The unconscious . . . is the source of the instinctual forces of the psyche and of the forms or categories that regulate them, namely the archetypes. [The Structure of the Psyche," CW 8, par. 342.]

exploration of religious themes in cinema becomes a canvas for the expression of profound psychological truths.

In the realm of Self-reflection and exploration, symbolism and imagery act as mirrors reflecting the intricacies of the psyche. They provide a language beyond words, enabling individuals to delve into the symbolic language of dreams, myths, and cultural motifs. Through this exploration, individuals may uncover hidden aspects of themselves, confront unresolved traumas, and embark on a transformative journey toward wholeness. As tools for psychological and spiritual introspection, symbols and imagery offer a non-linear and intuitive approach to understanding the Self. They allow for the expression of complex emotions, conflicts, and aspirations that may elude verbal articulation. Whether in the context of religious trauma or Theo-Film analysis, the evocative power of symbols invites individuals to navigate the intricate landscapes of their inner worlds, fostering a profound connection between the conscious and unconscious realms.

**Mythic Narratives**

Jungian psychology recognizes the power of myths[88] and stories in shaping our understanding of the world. Religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analyst can create multi-faith/meta-modern myths that blend elements of traditional myths with contemporary issues and dilemmas. These narratives can serve as a mirror, helping

[88] Ibid, 52. [Myth] An involuntary collective statement based on an unconscious psychic experience. The primitive mentality does not invent myths, it experiences them. Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche. Many of these unconscious processes may be indirectly occasioned by consciousness, but never by conscious choice. Others appear to arise spontaneously, that is to say, from no discernible or demonstrable conscious cause. ["The Psychology of the Child Archetype," CW 9i, par. 261.]

individuals make sense of their own lives and challenges. Jungian psychology recognizes the power of myths and stories in shaping our understanding of the world. Religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analysts can create multi-faith/meta-modern myths that blend elements of traditional myths with contemporary issues and dilemmas. These narratives can serve as a mirror, helping individuals make sense of their own lives and challenges. By weaving together the threads of ancient wisdom and present-day struggles, individuals engage in a process of mythopoeia, crafting stories that not only reflect personal journeys but also contribute to the collective tapestry of human experience. In this transformative act of storytelling, individuals may find a therapeutic outlet for processing religious trauma, navigating existential questions, and confronting the complexities of modern life. The synthesis of diverse mythic elements allows for a nuanced exploration of the sacred and the profane, the divine and the human, fostering a richer understanding of one's spiritual and psychological identity.

Furthermore, these meta-modern myths offer a platform for dialogue and connection across different belief systems. In a world marked by religious diversity and cultural pluralism, the creation of narratives that transcend specific religious boundaries becomes a powerful tool for fostering empathy and mutual understanding. Through the shared language of myth, people from varied backgrounds can discover common ground, promoting a sense of unity amidst the diversity of individual experiences. As individuals engage with these narratives, they embark on a journey of Self-discovery and Self-transcendence, unlocking new perspectives on their own narratives. The process becomes a dynamic interplay between the personal and the collective, allowing for the continual evolution of mythic frameworks that resonate with the ever-changing landscapes of both

inner and outer worlds. Ultimately, the creation and exploration of these multi-faith/meta-modern myths become a testament to the enduring relevance of mythic narratives in the human quest for meaning and connection.

**Collective Unconscious & Cultural Myths**

Jung's idea of the collective unconscious suggests that there are shared psychological elements across cultures. Religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analyst can tap into these universal themes to create stories that transcend cultural boundaries and resonate with millennials from diverse backgrounds. In the realm of Theo-Film analysis, the exploration of the collective unconscious and cultural myths becomes a potent tool for understanding the deep-seated archetypes that underlie cinematic narratives. These archetypes, as conceptualized by Carl Jung, are recurring symbols and motifs rooted in the collective human experience. Theo-Film analysts, particularly those attuned to the nuances of religious trauma, can skillfully employ these archetypes to delve into the psychological and spiritual dimensions of cinematic storytelling. The collective unconscious serves as a reservoir of shared symbols and mythic elements that transcend individual experiences and cultural differences. By tapping into this rich source, filmmakers and analysts can craft narratives that resonate on a profound level, addressing universal human struggles, aspirations, and existential questions. Whether exploring themes of redemption, sacrifice, or the eternal battle between good and evil, the collective unconscious provides a narrative framework that speaks to the fundamental aspects of the human psyche.

Religiously traumatized individuals, in particular, may find solace and resonance in films that draw upon these universal themes. Theo-Film analysis becomes a means of

decoding the symbolic language embedded in cinematic storytelling, allowing for a deeper understanding of the emotional and spiritual impact of these narratives. By recognizing and exploring the archetypal patterns within films, analysts can offer insights into the ways in which cinema becomes a vessel for collective healing and catharsis. Moreover, as these narratives transcend cultural boundaries, they become a bridge for connection among millennials from diverse backgrounds. In an era characterized by globalization and interconnectedness, stories that resonate on a universally human level contribute to a shared cultural experience. Theo-Film analysis becomes a key to unlocking the potential of cinema as a global language, fostering empathy and understanding among audiences with varied cultural, religious, and spiritual perspectives. In essence, the integration of Jungian concepts such as the collective unconscious into Theo-Film analysis not only enriches our understanding of cinematic storytelling but also underscores the profound impact that these narratives can have on religiously traumatized individuals and societies across the globe.

**Personal Transformation**

Individuation involves personal transformation and growth. Films can portray characters who go through transformative experiences and emerge as better, more Self-aware individuals. Such narratives can inspire religiously traumatized people to embark on their own journeys of Self-improvement and Self-actualization. Individuation involves personal transformation and growth. Films can portray characters who go through transformative experiences and emerge as better, more Self-aware individuals. Such narratives can inspire religiously traumatized people to embark on their own journeys of Self-improvement and Self-actualization. These cinematic depictions not only serve as a

source of inspiration but also provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of one's identity and beliefs. In the realm of personal development, the concept of individuation, often associated with Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, goes beyond mere Self-improvement. It dives into the deep exploration of the unconscious, the integration of conflicting aspects of the Self, and the realization of one's true, authentic identity. Films can effectively capture this intricate process, illustrating the challenges and triumphs that accompany the quest for Self-discovery.

Moreover, the power of storytelling in cinema lies in its ability to resonate with diverse audiences (multi-faith space). Individuals grappling with religious trauma may find solace and motivation in witnessing characters who confront their own inner struggles, overcome adversity, and ultimately embrace a more profound understanding of themselves. These narratives can act as a catalyst for those seeking to break free from the constraints of past experiences and societal expectations, encouraging them to embark on their unique paths toward personal transformation. By showcasing the transformative journey of characters on the big screen, films not only entertain but also serve as mirrors reflecting the universal human experience. The portrayal of individuation in cinema can foster empathy and connection among viewers, reinforcing the idea that personal growth is a dynamic and ongoing process. As audiences witness the evolution of characters, they may find parallels in their own lives, prompting introspection and a renewed sense of agency in their personal transformations. In essence, films become powerful tools for inspiration, offering narratives that transcend religious trauma and speak to the broader human condition. They have the potential to ignite the spark of Self-discovery and encourage individuals to embrace the challenges inherent in the journey toward becoming

more authentic, Self-aware beings. Through the art of storytelling, cinema becomes a beacon of hope, guiding individuals toward the profound and liberating path of individuation.

**Reflection & Dialogue**

Religiously traumatized people can engage in discussions and dialogues about the films they watch. This reflection can lead to a deeper understanding of their own individuation process and offer opportunities for mutual support and exploration. Engaging in reflection and dialogue about films can provide a therapeutic avenue for religiously traumatized individuals to explore and reconcile their emotions, beliefs, and experiences. By diving into the themes and narratives presented in movies, they may find parallels to their own struggles, enabling a cathartic release and a sense of validation and or Self acceptance. This process of dialogue can also foster a community of shared experiences, where individuals can express themselves openly without fear of judgment. Through respectful conversations, participants may discover new perspectives and coping mechanisms, ultimately contributing to their healing journey. Film discussions offer a platform for individuals to challenge preconceptions, question ingrained beliefs, and cultivate a more nuanced understanding of their own spiritual and psychological landscapes.

In essence, the shared exploration of cinematic narratives can act as a bridge (Between | Space) between diverse perspectives, promoting empathy and tolerance. This shared cultural experience allows individuals to connect on a human level, transcending religious differences and creating opportunities for genuine connection. As they navigate the complexities of their faith and trauma, the collaborative process of reflection and

dialogue can become a powerful tool for personal growth and the rebuilding of a more resilient and inclusive sense of Self.

Carl Jung's concept of individuation provides a powerful framework for religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analyst to create meta-modern myths through film. These narratives can introduce and stimulate healing and Self-development by offering relatable stories, exploring archetypal themes, and encouraging introspection and personal growth. By incorporating these Jungian principles into their work, religiously traumatized people and Theo-Film analyst can contribute to the cultural, spiritual, religious, and psychological development of the millennial generation and beyond. Additionally, embracing Jung's concept of individuation and Self in the context of creating meta-modern myths through film opens avenues for a more inclusive and diverse representation of spiritual and religious experiences. This approach allows for the exploration of various cultural and individual perspectives (multi-faith), fostering a sense of connection and understanding among audiences with diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, by integrating Jungian principles into their storytelling, religiously traumatized individuals and Theo-Film analysts can facilitate a collective dialogue on the intersectionality of faith (meta-spirituality), trauma, and personal transformation. This shared narrative space has the potential to break down barriers, reduce stigma, and promote empathy, contributing to the broader social fabric. In a rapidly changing world, where traditional religious structures may be evolving, the application of Jungian concepts in film offers a dynamic and adaptable means of addressing the evolving spiritual needs of contemporary society. It provides an artistic and imaginative platform

for the exploration of existential questions, the reevaluation of belief systems, and the fostering of resilience in the face of religious trauma.

Finally, the integration of Jung's individuation process and notion of Self into the creation of meta-modern myths through film not only aids in personal healing and development but also serves as a catalyst for societal transformation. It empowers both creators and audiences to engage with their own narratives, fostering a rich tapestry of stories that resonate across cultures and generations, ultimately contributing to the ongoing evolution of our collective consciousness (humanity).

**Research Question #3**

**How does the Paulo Freire model of intentional dialogue and active listening create a relatively therapeutic space for millennials who have experienced religious trauma?**

Figure 15: Theory & Praxis

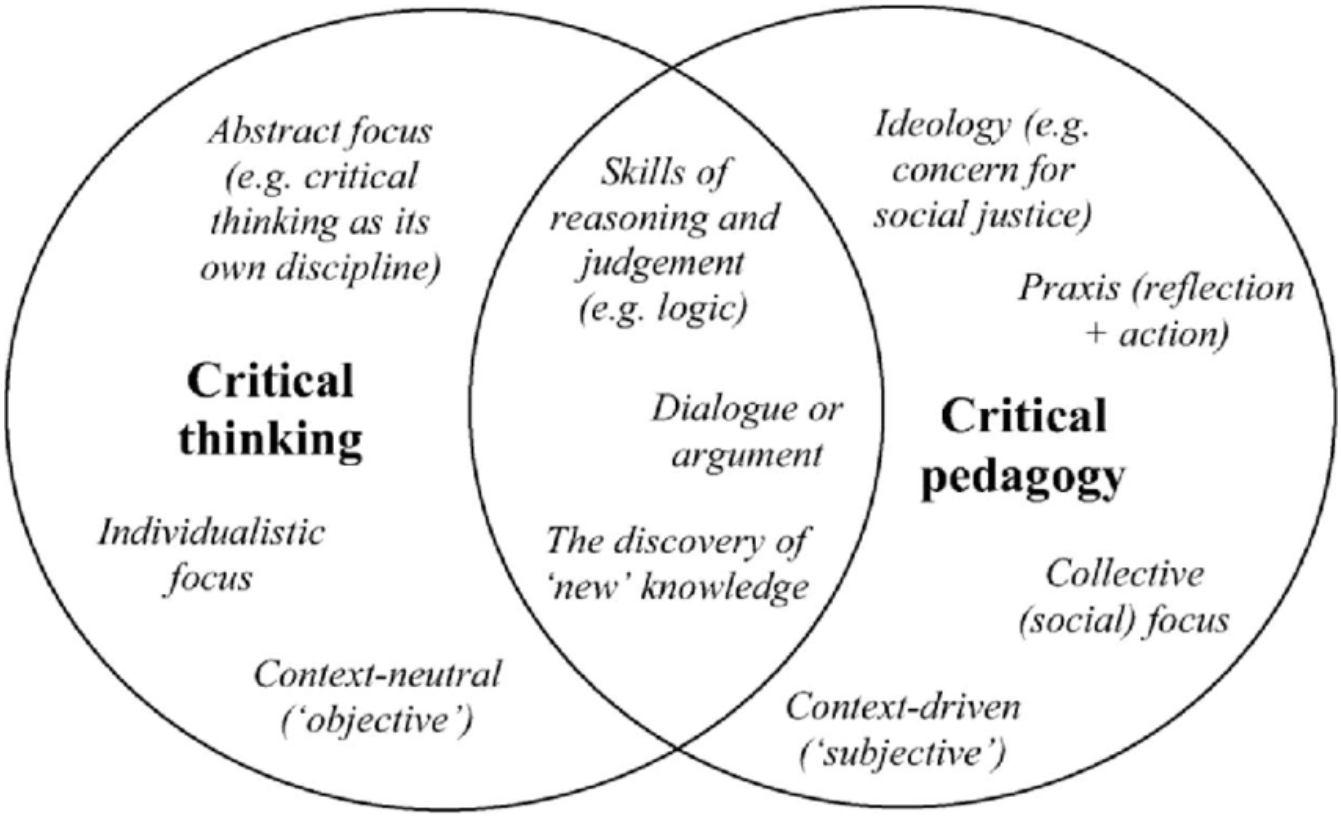
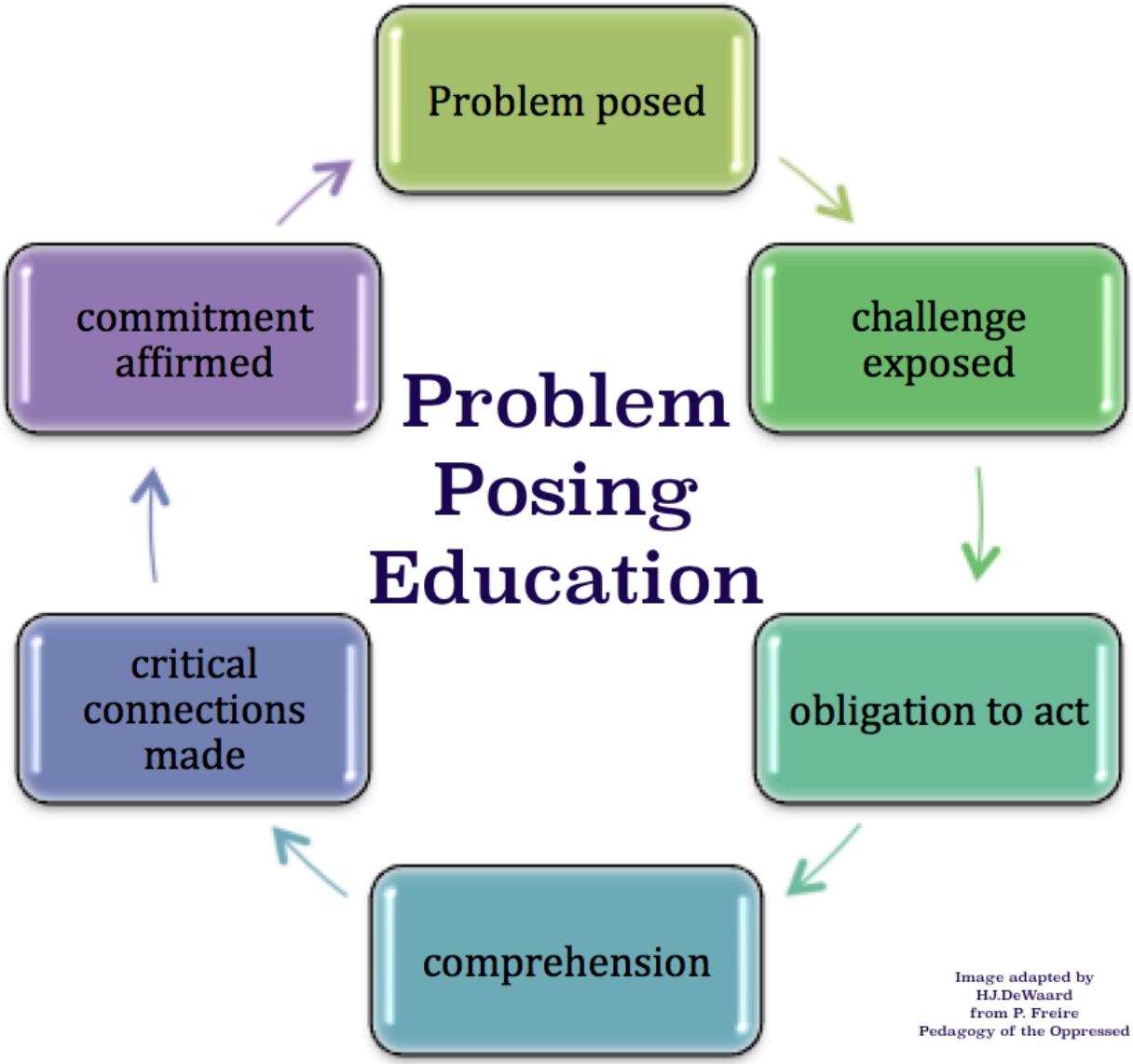


Figure 16: Problem Posing Education



The Paulo Freire model of intentional dialogue[89] and active listening, often associated with critical pedagogy and popular education, can be adapted to create a therapeutic/multi-faith space for millennials who have experienced religious trauma. While Freire's model was primarily developed for educational and social justice purposes, its principles can be valuable for addressing trauma and promoting healing in a supportive and empathetic environment (see figure 13). Here's how it can be applied to address religious trauma:

**Critical Reflection & Self-Awareness**

Freire's model encourages participants to critically reflect on their experiences and their relationship with the world. In the context of religious trauma, individuals are encouraged to explore their feelings, beliefs, and experiences within a safe multi-faith context. This reflection allows millennials and religiously traumatized people to gain Self-awareness, understand how their religious upbringing has affected them, and identify areas of trauma. This process of critical reflection fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of religious trauma. Participants may uncover the intricacies of how their beliefs have shaped their worldview and Self-perception. By engaging in this introspective journey, individuals can gradually untangle the complex web of emotions and thought patterns associated with their religious experiences. Additionally, the emphasis on Self-awareness within a multi-faith context

[89] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 17. “dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship- dialogue is a way. Of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task.”

encourages participants to appreciate diverse perspectives and recognize the impact of varying religious/spiritual backgrounds. This inclusive approach fosters empathy and a broader understanding of the diverse ways in which individuals navigate and experience faith and religious trauma.

Furthermore, the critical reflection process serves as a catalyst for personal growth and empowerment. Armed with a heightened Self-awareness, people are better equipped to make informed choices about their beliefs, values, and life paths. This transformative journey can lead to a more authentic and fulfilling expression of one's spirituality, free from the constraints of past traumas (meta-spirituality). In essence, Freire's model, when applied to the context of religious trauma, becomes a powerful tool for Self-discovery, healing, and the cultivation of a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of multi-faith experiences.

**Dialogue as Liberation**

Freire emphasizes dialogue as a means of liberation and empowerment. In a therapeutic/multi-faith space, millennials who have experienced religious trauma can engage in open and non-judgmental conversations about their experiences. Active listening is crucial, as it helps create a safe space where individuals can share their stories without fear of condemnation. Fostering a safe space through active listening, incorporating a framework of empathy and validation can further enhance the therapeutic/multi-faith dialogue for millennials grappling with religious trauma. Recognizing the validity of diverse spiritual journeys and acknowledging the emotional impact of those experiences can be instrumental in the healing process. Moreover, integrating multi-faith education on various religious and spiritual perspectives can

broaden understanding and facilitate respectful exchanges. This educational component encourages participants to explore alternative viewpoints, promoting tolerance and empathy while reducing the potential for misunderstanding.

Furthermore, emphasizing the empowerment of individuals by encouraging Self-reflection and critical thinking about their beliefs and experiences can be transformative. Providing tools for Self-discovery and personal growth empowers millennials to reconstruct their relationship with spirituality in a way that aligns with their authentic Selves. Additionally, a strengths-based approach can be employed to highlight the resilience and coping mechanisms individuals have developed in response to religious trauma. By focusing on strengths, the dialogue becomes a platform for reclaiming agency and autonomy, enabling participants to actively shape their spiritual narratives.

In the spirit of inclusivity, creating a space for shared rituals, mindfulness practices, or creative expressions can foster a sense of community and connection. These activities serve as avenues for healing, allowing participants to explore new ways of engaging with their spirituality and connecting with others on a profound level. In essence, the promotion of dialogue as a tool for liberation extends beyond active listening to encompass empathy, psychoeducation, empowerment, strengths-based approaches, and inclusive practices. Through these multifaceted strategies, therapeutic/multi-faith spaces can become catalysts for profound personal growth and healing for millennials navigating the complexities of religious trauma.

**Respecting Individual Narratives**

Freire's model values the individual's lived experience and perspective. Educators and Facilitators using this approach should respect and honor each person's narrative, allowing them to express their feelings and thoughts without imposing judgment or predetermined solutions. This validates experiences and helps build trust within a therapeutic/multi-faith space. Fostering a non-hierarchical and inclusive environment is essential in implementing Freire's model. Educators and Facilitators should actively listen to diverse voices and create a space where everyone feels heard and acknowledged, regardless of their background or beliefs. Embracing the multiplicity of narratives enriches the therapeutic process and promotes a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between personal experiences and social structures. Moreover, Freire's model encourages collaborative dialogue, emphasizing the importance of co-creating knowledge and solutions. In a therapeutic or multi-faith context, this means engaging in open and respectful conversations where individuals are active participants in their healing journey. This collaborative approach empowers individuals to take ownership of their narratives and contributes to a more democratic and egalitarian therapeutic process.

Furthermore, it's crucial for Educators and Facilitators to be culturally competent and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of those they work with. Freire's model invites an awareness of socio-cultural contexts and the impact they have on individual narratives. By recognizing and appreciating cultural nuances, Educators can create a more inclusive and culturally responsive space, fostering a sense of belonging for everyone involved. In essence, applying Freire's model involves not only respecting individual narratives but also cultivating an inclusive, collaborative, tolerant, and culturally sensitive therapeutic

environment. This holistic approach contributes to the development of trust, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between personal stories and the broader social context within a multi-faith framework.

**Problem-Posing Education**

Freire's approach involves problem-posing education, where participants collaboratively explore and analyze their experiences (see figure 14). In the context of religious trauma, this might involve identifying specific triggers, understanding the roots of trauma, and developing coping strategies. Problem-posing education empowers millennials and religiously traumatized people to actively engage with their healing process. Within the framework of problem-posing education, Freire emphasizes the importance of dialogue as a catalyst for critical thinking and transformative action. In the context of religious trauma, fostering open and respectful conversations becomes a cornerstone of this approach. Participants are encouraged to share their narratives, challenge preconceptions, and collectively construct new meanings and perspectives. By acknowledging the power dynamics inherent in religious institutions and the potential for oppressive ideologies, problem-posing education enables individuals to deconstruct harmful narratives that may have contributed to their religious trauma. This process not only involves personal reflection but also encourages a collective reevaluation of societal norms and structures.

In addition, problem-posing education recognizes the interconnectedness of personal and societal transformation. Participants are not merely passive recipients of information but active agents in shaping their reality. Through this approach, millennials and those affected by religious trauma can reclaim a sense of agency, empowering them to

question, resist, and ultimately reconstruct their relationship with faith, spirituality, and Self. Moreover, the ongoing nature of problem-posing education aligns with the evolving nature of religious trauma recovery. As individuals progress in their healing journey, they continually revisit and reassess their understanding of their religious trauma, adapting coping strategies and insights gained through dialogue and collaborative exploration. This dynamic process ensures that healing is not a static destination but a continuous, adaptive engagement with one's experiences and the broader societal context. In essence, problem-posing education, as advocated by Freire, offers a comprehensive and empowering framework for addressing religious trauma. Through dialogue, critical reflection, and collaborative exploration, individuals can actively participate in their healing, fostering resilience, and contributing to broader societal transformation.

**Solidarity & Community Building**

Freire's model promotes the idea of solidarity and collective action. In the context of religious trauma, a therapeutic/multi-faith space can encourage millennials and religiously traumatized people to connect with others who have similar experiences. Building a supportive community can help individuals feel less isolated and provide them with a network of understanding peers. The concept of solidarity and community building within Freire's model extends beyond mere connection—it fosters a shared sense of empowerment. In the realm of religious trauma, this empowerment can be transformative, enabling individuals to reclaim agency over their beliefs, values, and narratives. Within a therapeutic/multi-faith space inspired by Freirean principles, participants can engage in dialogues that promote critical reflection on their religious experiences. This not only validates their feelings but also encourages a collective exploration of diverse

perspectives and coping mechanisms. By dismantling oppressive power dynamics, this approach helps individuals break free from the shackles of religious trauma, allowing for personal growth and resilience.

Moreover, Freire's model emphasizes the importance of praxis, the integration of reflection and action. In the context of religious trauma, this translates into the community actively working together to challenge harmful belief systems and practices. Through collaborative efforts, individuals can contribute to a broader movement that advocates for religious inclusivity, tolerance, and understanding, thus creating lasting change beyond the immediate support network. In essence, Freire's model becomes a catalyst for not only healing but also for empowering individuals to become advocates for change within both their personal lives and their community. The solidarity and community built within this framework serve as a resilient foundation upon which individuals can reconstruct their identities and reclaim a sense of belonging, free from the constraints of religious trauma.

**Freirean Approach to Empowerment**

The Freirean approach seeks to empower individuals to take action and transform their own lives. In the case of religious trauma, this means helping millennials and or religiously traumatized people develop tools to address their trauma, whether it's through counseling, Self-help strategies, or other creative means of healing beyond religious practices and understandings. The Freirean approach, inspired by the teachings of Paulo Freire, goes beyond traditional educational models and emphasizes a participatory and dialogical process. In the context of addressing religious trauma among millennials and religiously traumatized individuals, this approach advocates for a collective journey

toward healing and Self-discovery. By fostering open dialogue and creating a space for critical reflection, the Freirean approach encourages individuals to examine the oppressive structures inherent in certain religious practices and beliefs. It empowers them to deconstruct harmful ideologies and reconstruct a healthier and more liberating perspective. In the process, individuals gain a deeper understanding of their own agency and the power to shape their narratives beyond the constraints of religious trauma.

Moreover, the Freirean approach recognizes the importance of community building. It encourages the formation of supportive networks where individuals can share their experiences, challenges, and triumphs. This communal solidarity becomes a vital source of strength and resilience, enabling those affected by religious trauma to collectively navigate their healing journey. In practical terms, the Freirean approach manifests through educational programs, workshops, and support groups that prioritize inclusivity, respect, and the co-creation of knowledge. These initiatives empower individuals not only to cope with their trauma but also to actively engage in the process of redefining their identities and aspirations. Ultimately, the Freirean approach to empowerment in the context of religious trauma seeks to liberate individuals from the shackles of oppressive religious experiences, providing them with the tools and support needed to reclaim their autonomy and lead fulfilling lives beyond the confines of past traumas.

**Reflective Praxis**

Freire's model emphasizes the importance of reflection leading to action (praxis) (see figure 15). Educators and Facilitators can encourage millennials and religiously traumatized people to reflect on their healing journey and actively work toward reducing the impact of religious trauma on their lives. Building upon Freire's model, the

integration of reflective praxis in therapeutic approaches becomes particularly crucial when addressing the unique challenges faced by millennials and individuals who have experienced religious trauma. By fostering a space for introspection, Educators and Facilitators empower their clients to explore the intricate layers of their trauma and discern how it has shaped their beliefs, values, and Self-perception. Moreover, guiding millennials and those affected by religious trauma through a reflective praxis encourages them to critically engage with the socio-cultural and religious contexts that may have contributed to their traumatic experiences.

This critical examination helps individuals to deconstruct harmful narratives and beliefs, allowing for the reconstruction of a more resilient and authentic sense of Self. In the context of religiously traumatized individuals, reflective praxis can involve unpacking the complex interplay between faith, spirituality, and trauma. Educators and Facilitators may assist people in navigating the tension between their desire for spiritual connection and the need to redefine their beliefs in a way that fosters healing. This process enables individuals to reclaim agency over their spiritual journey and cultivate a sense of empowerment in reconstructing a faith narrative that aligns with their evolving understanding and values.

Furthermore, Educators and Facilitators employing reflective praxis can guide millennials and religiously traumatized individuals in translating insights gained through reflection into tangible, affirmative actions. This transformative aspect of praxis empowers people to not only understand their religious trauma but also actively engage in strategies that mitigate its impact on their daily lives. By promoting intentional and purposeful action Educators and Facilitators a proactive approach to healing, encouraging

clients to implement positive changes in their relationships, Self-perception, and overall well-being. In essence, the application of reflective praxis, inspired by Freire's model, becomes a powerful tool in the therapeutic arsenal when working with millennials and those affected by religious trauma. This approach facilitates a profound journey of self-discovery, critical examination, and purposeful action, ultimately paving the way for transformative healing and the cultivation of Self-identity among community.

By applying the Paulo Freire model of intentional dialogue and active listening in a Theopoetic multi-faith educational context, we can create a space that promotes healing, Self-awareness, and empowerment for millennials and religiously traumatized people challenged or suffering from unresolved religious trauma. This approach helps individuals process their experiences, identify Self, and build a sense of agency in their own spiritual journey.

Chapter 4: Outcomes

**Goal 1:** Co-create (with Site-team) a state of consciousness (Community) for people who have experienced religious trauma and or separated from a religious community like the Church. Public|Space[90] (see Figure 17) is a meta-spiritual (multi-faith) space created for those experiencing religious trauma and are looking for community beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." A space of relationship influenced by individuation (the process of understanding Self). An Altar in the Wilderness.

Figure 17: Public|Space

- ***Strategy 1*:** Create an online multi-faith community for religiously traumatized people to join and gather.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Focus on inviting others to join, create, speak, and be heard in Public|Space.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Prepare public messages, expressions, and advertisements that Theopoetically promote the initiation of individuation as well as "God beyond religion."

[90] Aaron Waldron, "Public|Space - YouTube Playlist," www.youtube.com, February 1, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo2_3GkUKZ4Hb1NHKlTBPNSNRtw7Dg_Va.

**Evaluation of Goal 1:** Community members and guest will be asked to complete a monthly questionnaire that allows them to offer feedback, critique, or suggestions. The community must grow based on its occupants, therefore monitoring the growth of members will provide information that can be measured and evaluated.

In February 2023, we launched a digital multi-faith/meta-spiritual community called "Public|Space" using a company/platform called: "Mighty Networks." Consent forms were emailed to people who demonstrated interest in being a part of this eight-month multi-faith social experiment. The following reflects our observations, experiences and learning over an eight-month period (February to October in the year 2023 C.E).

When we think about how to explain what Public|Space is and represents, we think of an ecclesia:[91] a community of consciousness, a collective choice to creatively co-think in an infinitely chaotic process called life. Another perspective is "community as a group of individuals who share a mutual concern for one another's welfare."[92] All living things seek out community, we are designed to be relational, and build relationships. However, Public|Space as a community is different. In the depths of religious trauma, when the foundations of faith crumble and wounds of the spirit run deep, a sacred space emerges—a sanctuary called Public|Space. It is within this nurturing haven that individuals who have experienced religious trauma find solace, healing, and the courage to embark on a

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[91] Anthony Daley, *The Ekklesia* (FL: Creation House, 2012.), 35-36. The *Ekklēsia* are the called-out ones, a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into and convened into a public place for the purpose of deliberating and worship. Strong's G1577: ἐκκλησία (ekklésia) -- an assembly, a (religious) congregation.

[92] Charles Vogl, *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging* (CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016), 9.

journey of Self-discovery. Public|Space is more than a community; it is a testament to the transformative power of healing, creativity, and communal support.

In Public|Space, we recognize that religious trauma leaves lasting imprints on the soul—a shattered trust in religious institutions, a loss of identity, and deep emotional wounds. We acknowledge the pain of those who have been wounded by dogma, exclusion, manipulation, or abuse in the name of religion. In response, we offer a refuge—a place where individuals can reclaim their voice, explore their spirituality, and heal alongside a compassionate community.

Healing is at the core of our mission in Public|Space. We understand that healing is not a linear journey, but rather a sacred dance between Self-reflection, compassionate listening, and the reweaving of one's spiritual tapestry. Through curated resources, exclusive content, and tailored support, we empower individuals to traverse their unique healing paths. Whether it is through Self-care practices, therapy recommendations, or guided meditations, Public|Space aims to provide the tools necessary for resilience and transformation. Creativity is a powerful companion on the journey of healing, and it takes center stage within Public|Space. We celebrate the diverse expressions of art and creativity as potent mediums for Self-expression and catharsis. From poetry to painting, music to movement, each artistic exploration becomes a brushstroke on the canvas of healing. Through inclusive presentations, guided meditations, creative prompts, and collaborative projects, we encourage individuals to unlock their creative potential, tap into their inner wisdom, and reimagine their narratives.

Within the Theopoetic boundaries of Public|Space, community thrives. Here, individuals find a supportive network of like-minded souls who share their experiences,

understand their struggles, and walk alongside them on the path of healing and development of Self-identity. Private discussion forums, support groups, and live Q&A sessions become a refuge for compassionate listening, validation, and connection. Through the sharing of stories, insights, and resources, a web of solidarity is woven, reminding each member that they are not alone in their healing journey. But Public|Space extends beyond healing—it is a space for intellectual inquiry and spiritual exploration. Here, we engage in thought-provoking discussions, dive into theological concepts, and examine the intersections of spirituality and social justice. We honor the power of critical analysis and questioning as tools for growth, encouraging each member to reclaim their agency and redefine their understanding of Self, Faith, Spirituality, and the Divine.

Public|Space also revealed to us a leadership style and archetype we call: a *Path-Maker*. A mind-set (archetype) of "not knowing the path" allows us to intuitively navigate the path unfolding: it's being present in a series of moments so that we may embrace love and understanding. Love is our compass that is not programmed but is organically alive and present. A *Path-Maker* naturally is a leader in a community of people who naturally go off path, exhibiting an intuitive sense of navigating psycho-spiritual terrain such as the *inner-terrestrial*: the uncharted, unexplored metaphysical terrain within our Self that has been affected by life's experiences (individuation). A *Path-Maker* is one who demonstrates an authentic style of charismatic leadership in such a way that it mutually transforms practitioner and leader. As a *Path-Maker*, we are aware

of our relative *True North*: “a clear idea of who [we] are, where [we] are going and what the right thing is to do.”[93]

The *Path-Maker* archetype is a powerful and transformative figure who guides and inspires others on their individual journeys of Self-discovery and transformation. They possess a profound understanding of the meta-spiritual realm, bridging the gap between the spiritual and physical worlds; embodying a Between | Space. The *Path-Maker* archetype acts as an advocate for individuality and fosters an environment of growth and Self-realization within their communities. They are seekers of truth and catalysts for personal and collective development.

**Meta-Spiritual/Multi-Faith Understanding & Practice**

The *Path-Maker* archetype possesses a deep understanding of the meta-spiritual aspects of existence. They recognize that spirituality extends beyond organized religion and dogma, embracing diverse philosophies and practices. They embody the exploration of the interconnectedness of all beings, the importance of intuitive wisdom, and the recognition of one's unique path. They guide others to transcend conventional beliefs, encouraging exploration and open-mindedness. The *Path-Maker* archetype is a beacon of transformation, navigating the intricate landscapes of consciousness with a keen awareness of the ever-evolving nature of spiritual growth. They view challenges as opportunities for profound Self-discovery and understand that the journey itself is a sacred ritual, filled with lessons waiting to be learned.

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[93] Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 9th ed (LA: SAGE, 2022), 224.

In their quest for enlightenment, *Path-Maker's* tap into ancient wisdom while remaining attuned to the pulse of contemporary thought. They weave a tapestry of spiritual understanding that harmonizes tradition with innovation, recognizing that the essence of spirituality transcends the constraints of time and culture. These individuals are adept at helping others decipher the cryptic messages embedded in their life experiences, guiding them toward self-realization and personal empowerment. The *Path-Maker* encourages a holistic approach to spirituality, emphasizing the integration of mind, body, and spirit. They inspire a profound connection to the universal energy that flows through all living things, fostering a sense of unity and interconnectedness.

With an unwavering commitment to authenticity, *Path-Maker's* champion the freedom to forge a unique spiritual path tailored to individual beliefs and experiences. They celebrate diversity in thought and encourage others to embrace the beauty of their own unfolding spiritual journey. Through their guidance, the *Path-Maker* archetype invites others to embark on a transformative quest, embracing the mysteries of existence and unlocking the boundless potential within the soul.

**Strengths**

The *Path-Maker* archetype champions individuality, emphasizing the importance of embracing one's true Self and unique gifts. They inspire others to break free from societal expectations, allowing for authentic Self-expression and personal growth. They serve as catalysts for personal and collective transformation, encouraging others to challenge their limiting beliefs, expand their consciousness, and evolve spiritually. Their guidance and wisdom inspire profound shifts in perspectives and behaviors, igniting inner change and awakening. The *Path-Maker* archetype possesses heightened intuition,

offering intuitive insights and guidance to those they mentor. They have a deep connection with their inner wisdom and the spiritual realm, helping individuals navigate their own inner journeys with clarity and compassion. They bridge the gap between the spiritual and physical worlds, effectively communicating spiritual concepts and experiences in relatable ways. They translate complex ideas into practical wisdom, making spirituality accessible and relevant to people's daily lives.

**Weaknesses**

The *Path-Maker* archetype may feel isolated or misunderstood due to their unique perspectives and unconventional beliefs. They may struggle to find like-minded individuals or face resistance from those who fear change or challenge traditional norms. The responsibility of guiding and inspiring others can be emotionally and energetically demanding. The *Path-Maker* archetype may sometimes neglect their own Self-care, prioritizing the well-being of others over their own needs. Their deep desire for transformation and growth may lead to impatience with others who are not yet ready or receptive to change. They must learn to honor each person's unique journey and respect the pace of individual transformation.

**Significance**

The *Path-Maker* archetype plays a significant role in advocating for individuality and inspiring transformation within their communities. They challenge the status quo, encouraging others to question societal norms and embrace their true Selves. By fostering an environment of growth and Self-realization, they empower individuals to explore their own spiritual paths, discover their unique gifts, and express their authentic nature. The *Path-Maker* archetype also embarks on their own inward journey, continuously seeking

personal growth and Self-transformation. Their own quest for truth and Self-realization serves as an inspiration to others, demonstrating the transformative power of embracing one's individual path. Through their strengths and weaknesses, the *Path-Maker* archetype creates a ripple effect of change, helping individuals and communities evolve spiritually, embrace their uniqueness, and create a more harmonious and awakened world.

**Walking with Others Through the Wilderness**

Life is often characterized by transformative journeys, and for individuals who have left their religious communities, the path forward can be akin to traversing a wilderness. Drawing inspiration from the Hebrew story of Exodus, Public|Space explores the metaphorical journey of walking with people who have experienced religious trauma as they navigate the uncharted territory of leaving religion to discover their authentic Selves—the Theopoetic "land of milk and honey."

C. **Departing from the Familiar:** Just as the Israelites in the Exodus story left the familiarity of Egypt behind, individuals leaving religion embark on a profound transition. This departure entails letting go of long-held beliefs, traditions, and communities that once provided structure and meaning. Like the Israelites, these individuals face uncertainty, fear, and a sense of loss as they step into the unknown.

B. **Wandering through the Wilderness:** The wilderness represents the transitional period that follows leaving religion. It is a time of searching, questioning, and Self-discovery. Just as the Israelites wandered in the desert, individuals navigating religious transition often grapple with existential questions, doubts, and a reevaluation of their values and worldview. It is a time of profound introspection,

as they confront the complexities of their own identity outside the confines of religious dogma.

C. **Nurturing the Inner Journey:** Amidst the wilderness, individuals are called to embark on an inner journey of Self-discovery. They must redefine their values, moral compass, and beliefs based on their personal experiences and critical reflection. This process requires introspection, Self-compassion, and an exploration of diverse perspectives. By diving deep within themselves, individuals can cultivate an authentic sense of Self, paving the way for personal growth and transformation.

D. **Embracing the Support of Companions:** As the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness, they did not walk alone. Similarly, those leaving religion benefit from companionship and support. Walking alongside empathetic individuals who have undergone similar transitions or compassionate allies can provide solace, understanding, and validation. This community can offer a safe space for sharing stories, exchanging wisdom, and providing encouragement during moments of doubt or vulnerability.

E. **Discovering the Land of Milk & Honey:** In the Exodus myth, the *Promised Land* symbolizes a place of abundance and fulfillment. Likewise, individuals who have left religion embark on a quest to discover their own Theopoetic *land of milk & honey*—a life infused with authenticity, purpose, and personal fulfillment. Through Self-discovery, exploring new belief systems, and cultivating meaningful connections, they can forge a path aligned with their true Selves.

Walking with individuals through the wilderness who are religiously traumatized and in transition is a journey that requires experience, empathy, understanding, and support. Drawing inspiration from the Exodus myth, we recognize the challenges, doubts, and Self-exploration faced by those who have experienced religious trauma. By acknowledging their journey and offering companionship, we can help foster a safe and nurturing environment for them to discover their authentic Selves—the Theopoetic *land of milk and honey*. As we embrace this role, we contribute to a society that recognizes and respects individual paths, ultimately promoting personal growth, empathy, and the celebration of diverse identities (multi-faith).

As Public|Space continues to evolve, it remains dedicated to fostering an environment where individuals feel seen, heard, and supported. It is a testament to the resilience of the human Spirit—a space where religious trauma is acknowledged, but not defining. Through healing, creativity, and community, Public|Space emerges as a beacon of hope—a sanctuary where scars are transformed into sources of strength, where creativity becomes a catalyst for healing, and where a diverse tapestry of voices unites to redefine spirituality and Self in the wake of trauma.

**Goal 2:** Co-create a series of Theo-Film study courses that use Jungian Analysis to identify and understand archetypical symbols in film. Between|Film[94] (see Figure 17) will be a series of online courses that use a dialogical approach once a week for three hours over a 3-week period.

Figure 18: Between|Film

- ***Strategy 1*:** Focus on marketing BETA Between|Film Courses: online courses through Zoom in 2023.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Organize & study films.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Develop syllabuses for the following dialogue categories: a Shadow, a Community, and a Heroes Journey.

**Evaluation of Goal 3:** Students will be asked to complete a pre and post course questionnaire that allows them to observe and compare what they knew before the course to what they learned after the course. The post questionnaire will also offer the space of opportunity for students to share feedback, opinions, critique, or suggestions on how the course can be improved.

[94] Aaron Waldron, "Between|Film (BETA) - YouTube Playlist," www.youtube.com, March 1, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo2_3GkUKZ4HnTKmKQKWfhRxxa1bAn0uP.

In March 2023, we launched a series of online beta courses called "Between|Film" using Zoom to meet for class on Saturdays from 1pm EST to 3pm EST. Consent forms and syllabus's (See Appendix D: Course Syllabus's) were emailed to people who demonstrated interest in being a part of this three-part series of Theo-Film courses/dialogues. The cohort was small, not exceeding six students at any time and dialogues lasted two hours max. The following reflects our observations, experiences and learning over a series of three courses in March, May, and August of 2023 C.E.

As a 21st century religiously traumatized Theopoet[95] who experiences God in film, we[96] have been inspired by colonization and our religious traumas to offer a space for those seeking God beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." The space we are offering is called, Between|Film[97] and it's a series of Theo-Film Studies that ontologically challenges us with Theopoetic reflection, drawing on approaches and methods from film studies, meta-modernism, Theopoetics, Jungian psychology, Religions, Spirituality, and ontology. Between|Film involves examining films as cultural and ontological byproducts that both reflect and shape religious, spiritual and theological symbols of meaning and identity. How those meanings affect us as humans in the 21st Century is what we aim to study and further understand.

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[95] A Theopoet is someone who embodies an intersection of theology and poetics. This embodiment involves exploring and expressing spiritual and religious experiences through the use of artistic and literary forms, such as poetry, fiction, and drama. The word "Theopoet" is capitalized to denote its centrality and sacredness.

[96] My pronouns are *they*, *their* and *them*. We do not identify in the singular first-person pronoun (I), but instead, we identify as a collective third person pronoun (we). Throughout this dissertation, we will use illeism to refer to our Self as *me, us, ours* and *we*.

[97] Aaron Waldron, "Between|Film," aShamaninJourney, accessed February 11, 2023, https://www.ashamaninjourney.com/betweenspace.

**Theo-Film Analysis**

Between|Film is the act and process of Theo-Film analysis or theological interpretation of film. An approach to film analysis that explores the intersection of film, psychology, notion of Self,[98] Spirituality and religious or theological ideas/concepts. It involves examining films as cultural and ontological byproducts that both reflect and shape religious, spiritual, and theological symbols of meaning. How those meanings affect us as humans in the 21st Century is what we are after. A Theo-Film study can take a variety of forms, but it generally involves applying Psychological, Spiritual, Religious and Theological concepts to the analysis of films. This can include exploring the ways in which films engage with themes such as sin, redemption, grace, Self-identity, human origins, and divine intervention. It can also involve examining the ways in which films engage with particular religious/Spiritual traditions and or symbols.

Between|Film is a series of Theo-Film studies that ontologically challenges us with theopoetic reflections, drawing on approaches and methods from film studies, Theopoetics, Jungian psychology, Religions, Spirituality, and ontology. It can be used to analyze a range of different types of films, from explicitly religious films to more secular political films that engage with socio-religious themes in Theopoetic ways. Overall,

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[98] Daryl Sharp, *JUNG LEXICON: A Primer of Terms & Concepts,* 73. [Self] The archetype of wholeness and the regulating center of the psyche; a transpersonal power that transcends the ego. As an empirical concept, the self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. It expresses the unity of the personality as a whole. But in so far as the total personality, on account of its unconscious component, can be only in part conscious, the concept of the self is, in part, only potentially empirical and is to that extent a postulate. In other words, it encompasses both the experienceable and the inexperienceable (or the not yet experienced). It is a transcendental concept, for it presupposes the existence of unconscious factors on empirical grounds and thus characterizes an entity that can be described only in part. ["Definitions," CW 6, par. 789.]

Between|Film seeks to deepen our understanding of the relationship between a notion of a religiously traumatized Self and religious values through film, and to explore the ways in which films can be a 21st Century Theopoetic healing tool for reflecting on and engaging with a religiously traumatized Self, Religion, Spirituality, and ontological inquiries.

**Film As Sacred Text**

As far back as humanity has revealed about early humans and how we as a species communicated, we find symbols in caves that tell a prehistoric story/narrative of humanity in relation to its ecological surroundings. *Text* are symbols[99] given meaning through the audience's perspective of understanding, an agreed language of communication. As a 21st Century Theopoet: a Shaman in Journey traveling on an inward journey towards Self, we understand people as sacred living text: *Living Symbol's.*[100] Between|Film co-creates spaces of opportunity for religiously traumatized people to understand their Self[101] as *sacred living text*: an expression of God beyond colonized religion. Understanding people as a S*acred Living Text* allows us to see the fluidity in Self meaning and break free from colonized notions of God and Self. We believe written text is dead until S*acred Living Text* gives meaning and purpose to it. To be alive is to have purpose and meaning; humans possess the power to breathe life into *dead text*: a

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[99] David Ray Griffin, *Archetypal Process*, 78. [Jung's definition of symbol] A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible expression of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented, is symbolic… So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Michael C Smith, Jung *and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 120. The archetypal Self, as we have noted, is not the center of the field of consciousness (i.e., it is not the ego), but is a deeper organizing principle to which ego-consciousness must become related. The totality of Self.

resurrection of life through an intrapersonal understanding of Self. Between|Film is where we begin to empathize and engage with other *sacred living texts*: attempting to co-create bridges of language that seeks to understand Self as living moving *Words of God* outside of the settled "Four Walls of Colonized Religion" revealing the organic S*acred Living Text* of humans. By revealing a person's *sacred living text*: a vulnerably complicated intersectionality of Self-identity; we are Theopoetically and hermeneutically reading a person's autobiography.

The late Jean Paul Gustave Ricoeur was a French philosopher known for merging phenomenological description with hermeneutics. In the book "Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation," Ricoeur described text as "any discourse fixed by writing."[102] He goes on to say how fixed by writing is "a discourse which could be said- is written precisely because it is not said. Fixation by writing takes the very place of speech, occurring at the site where speech could have emerged."[103] If text can be the written manifestation of a thought and our thoughts make up who we think we are, then understanding people as S*acred Living Text* that is written or spoken is the next step in building safe, healthy communities or relationships that aim to understand a human in a context of religious trauma. Within a religious trauma context, we must consider how everything a S*acred Living Text* comes into relationship with is an extension of that living text and must be included in the hermeneutical process to achieve a fuller understanding. This now opens possibilities for what is used to

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[102] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* (NY, Cambridge University Press, 2016), 145.

[103] Ibid, 146.

understand people and what is used to help people understand their Self, such as body movement, astrology, psychology, theology, art, film, poetry, and music. All of these are examples of extensions of Self in an early 21st century meaning crisis. What does a person's preferred style of film say to who they are and how they are expressing God? What does someone's zodiac sign say to how they learn and how God is emerging? How can we experience God in peoples Theopoetry or witness God in their Art? How can God be recognized and understood through digital spaces of illusions like film? These are the Between|Film questions that are inspired by what Ricoeur says about text. Investigating questions like these will take us into a process of Theo-Film contextualization.

Context is how we understand the "text" or "Sacred Living Text" within a specific space such as film. Engaging in dialogue that honors another is a form of contextual empathy—taking time and energy to intentionally understand someone or something without disregarding their context and their understanding or perspective—existing in a space of curiosity that doesn't wish to understand others to conquer but instead, aims to understand others to be in relationship: community. Between|Film is a space of empowerment and understanding; *archetypically feminine led*[104] coursework that supports religiously traumatized people attempting to connect with God beyond the walls of colonized religion. When we are in community with others, it is an intentional act of listening to understand as well as radically loving someone other than our Self. The

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[104] Neumann, *The Fear of the Feminine and Other Essays on Feminine Psychology*, 231. This means that the mother of the primal relationship, as the one who encompasses, contains, and directs life, is at the same time both world, and Self in one. -an archetypal, transpersonal position-no matter how the infant may experience her [Mother archetype] physically, she is objectively the surrounding world in which and from which it lives.

*reader/audience* seeking to understand the *author/Film* is a transformative act that Between|Film prophetically takes on.

The late, Paul-Michel Foucault was a French philosopher who defined an author as an *ideological production*: meaning an *author/Film* comes into being based on or relating to a particular system of ideas and ideals, specifically concerning economic or political theory and policy. "One can say that the author [/Film] is an ideological product since we represent [it] as the opposite of [its] historically real function. When a historically given function is represented in a figure that inserts it, one has an ideological production. The author [/Film] is, therefore, the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning."[105] Similarly, an *author/Film*, through a Theopoet's perspective, is a lifesystem[106] that expresses meaning in specific spaces of time. We think Foucault is alluding to an eschatological concept when he speaks of a world that doesn't require an *author symbol*: a system of ideas, specifically concerning economic or political theory and policy. Foucault says: "I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author-function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint – one that will no longer be the author but will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced [expérimenter]."[107] It's through our prophetic imagination that we believe we can

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[105] Michel Foucault, and James D. Faubion, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 222.

[106] Melanie L Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 112. [a living thing] inclusive of a variety of religious, and faith traditions, as well as mystical, and metaphysical belief system.

[107] Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology,* 222.

envision a world that does not require a particular *author/Film* because it no longer requires an *absolute past*.[108] The late Russian philosopher of language, Mikhail Bakhtin protested how an *absolute past* "is both monochronic and valorized (hierarchical); it lacks any relativity, that is, any gradual, purely temporal progressions that might connect it with the present."[109]

As a religiously traumatized Theopoet on an inward Journey, we aspire to contextualize Self in a multi-dimensional way using Between|Film. We seek to examine our inner religiously traumatic text that has been organically written and archived into a dark filing cabinet. We wish to embody prophetic S*acred Living Text* that inspires other *authors/Films* to tell their stories and challenges outdated colonized text written to preserve *absolute past*. We believe as a Theopoet, the God that pulls us into action or motion is a living/moving *sacred text* because it's an expression of a living/moving God. If we are a thought of God made into a S*acred Living Text* "written" by God, then God is the Author, Film and the Producer who charismatically sets the *Genre*[110] for all S*acred Living Text* to become myth and stories that inspire unimaginable possibilities.

**A Heroes Journey**

The Hero's Journey is a narrative structure or archetype that describes the typical path of a hero or protagonist in a story or myth. This concept was first introduced by the

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[108] M M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (TX: University of Texas Press, 2017), 326.
[109] Ibid, 326.
[110] Ibid, M. 326.

late mythologist Joseph Campbell, who studied the myths and stories from different cultures and found that they shared a similar structure. The Hero's Journey usually consists of three main stages: departure, initiation, and return. In the departure stage, the hero leaves their ordinary world and embarks on a quest or adventure. In the initiation stage, the hero faces various challenges and obstacles, undergoes a transformation or a series of trials, and gains new skills and knowledge. In the return stage, the hero returns to their ordinary world, transformed and ready to share their newfound wisdom with others. The Hero's Journey has been used as a framework for many popular stories/films, including "The Matrix (1999)," "UP (2009)," and "The Lion King (1994)." It has become a popular and practical tool for writers, filmmakers, and storytellers to create compelling narratives that resonate with audiences.

Theopoetically, Between|Film will offer humans an opportunity to reconnect with their Self and understand their Self in a relatively healthier way. This process will initiate what Joseph Campbell calls: a *Hero's Journey* or *monomyth*[111](see Figure 8 & 19) and does not require a Bible, a blood sacrifice, doctrine or being colonized. Based on how religiously traumatized millennials in our research are responding to colonized religion in Amerika; Between|Film offers a relatively safer learning space for those seeking something beyond a colonized understanding of Self.

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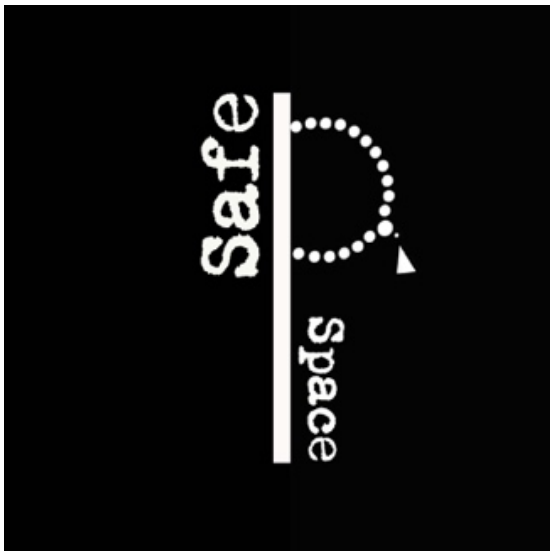
[111] Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces: A Brilliant Examination, through Ancient Hero Myths, of Man's Eternal Struggle for Identity*, 49-243.

Figure 19: The Heroes Journey (8 Steps)

**Goal 3:** Co-create a Between | Space that offers opportunity for Self-healing (individuation) through intentional listening and dialogue. Safe|Space (see Figure 20) is a Theopoetic mirroring space that reflects the occupants regardless of their relative intellect or understanding of morals or perfection. A feminine space. A chaplains space. A relatively safe space.

Figure 20: Safe|Space




- ***Strategy 1*:** Implement "Shamanic Journeying" through dialogue, particularly Paulo Freire's method of increasing humanity through a critical pedagogy dialogue.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Hosting one on one or group spaces online or in person that are Shamanic spaces for millennials who have experienced religious trauma.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Implement Paulo Freire's concept of "listening through dialogue."

**Evaluation of Goal 3**: Participants will be asked to complete a pre-session questionnaire that allows them to offer feedback, critique, or suggestions. This pre-session questionnaire will also ask the participant to share their feelings, a color and memory that correlates to that feeling.

In February 2023, we launched a listening space called “Safe|Space.” Consent forms were emailed to people who demonstrated interest in being a part of this eight-month social experiment. We aimed to understand religious trauma and how it affects the human condition by listening to several millennials who are experiencing religious trauma in Amerika during the 21st century. The following reflects our observations, experiences and learning over an eight-month period (February to October in the year 2023 C.E.).

Safe|Space is a meta-spiritual/multi-faith approach to healing by using active listening; designed specifically to support individuals who have experienced religious trauma. Drawing upon the transformative power of art, spirituality, and narrative, this approach seeks to guide individuals on a journey of healing, reconnection, and empowerment. By intertwining the realms of theology, poetry, and therapy, Safe|Space embraces the complexity of religious experiences and fosters an active listening space for individuals to explore and reconstruct their spiritual narratives.

**Core Principles:**

- **Honoring Personal Narratives:** Safe|Space acknowledges that each person's experience of religious trauma is unique. It respects and values the individual's personal narrative, allowing space for their truth to be heard and validated.
- **Theopoetic Expression:** This listening space utilizes the power of Theopoetic expression, combining theology and poetry to create a safe and imaginative space for exploration. Using metaphor, symbol, and language,

individuals can creatively engage with their religious experiences, reinterpreting and reconstructing their understanding of spirituality.

- **Embracing Mystery & Ambiguity:** Recognizing that religious trauma often stems from rigid dogmas, Safe|Space encourages individuals to embrace mystery and the unknown. By challenging black-and-white (binary) thinking, it fosters a more nuanced and expansive understanding of spirituality, allowing for the coexistence of doubt and faith (meta-spirituality/multi-faith).
- **Ritual & Symbolism:** Safe|Space integrates ritual and symbolism into the therapeutic process. By engaging with sacred rituals or creating new ones, individuals can reclaim and redefine their spiritual practices, grounding themselves in transformative symbols that hold personal meaning and healing power.
- **Community Support:** Recognizing the importance of community, Safe|Space encourages individuals to connect with others who have experienced religious trauma (Public | Space). Group listening sessions provide a safe space for sharing stories, fostering empathy, and building a sense of belonging.

**The Process:**

- **Safe & Trusting Environment:** The facilitator establishes a safe and trusting environment, where individuals feel comfortable sharing their experiences without judgment. This includes establishing clear boundaries and ensuring confidentiality.

- **Narrative Exploration:** Through reflective dialogue, individuals share their religious/spiritual journey, exploring moments of trauma, doubt, failure, and disconnection. The facilitator listens attentively, helping to identify patterns, triggers, and areas that require deeper exploration.
- **Theopoetic Expression:** Individuals are encouraged to engage in various forms of Theopoetic expression, such as writing poetry, creating visual art, or composing music. These creative mediums serve as a means of externalizing emotions, thoughts, and spiritual inquiries.
- **Symbolic Exploration:** Utilizing ritual and symbolism, individuals are guided in exploring their personal connection to sacred objects, symbols, or practices. They may choose to redefine existing rituals or create new ones that align with their evolving spiritual beliefs.
- **Reconstructing Spiritual Narrative:** Through a collaborative process, individuals work with the facilitator to reconstruct their spiritual narrative. This may involve revisiting theological concepts, reinterpreting religious texts, or integrating diverse spiritual traditions.
- **Community Integration:** Group listening sessions offer individuals the opportunity to share their journey, exchange insights, and find support from others who have experienced religious trauma. Community integration may also extend to engaging with progressive religious organizations or seeking mentorship from spiritual guides/ancestors.

Safe|Space, a meta-spiritual approach to healing, empowers individuals to navigate and heal from religious trauma. By embracing creativity, narrative, and

spirituality, this approach fosters a safe and transformative space for individuals to reclaim their spiritual autonomy, reconstruct their beliefs, and find meaning on their unique paths. Through this journey, individuals can rediscover a sense of wholeness, connection, and empowerment in their spiritual lives.

# Chapter 5: Reflection on Competences

Our site team consisted of four religiously traumatized millennials from completely different backgrounds and one advisor with a Ph.D. who empathized with religiously traumatized people. Towards the launch of Public|Space in February 2023, two site team members were unable to continue researching with us due to personal issues and lack of availability. We wish to note that the two site team members who had to leave the project contributed a lot before we launched the digital community and started the eight months of research. Their testimonies and shared religious traumas contributed a greater sense of context for the project and inspired us to consider possible future projects. We sincerely thank them for everything they offered this dissertation. During the eight months of research (Feb 2023 C.E.-Oct 2023 C.E.), Yesenia Fernandez, and my advisor: Rafael Reyes III, Ph.D. worked together in synergy to aid me in the further development and exploration of this dissertation. Between Yesenia and Dr. Reyes, they both helped me to remain accountable to my two chosen competencies for personal development. By meeting periodically at scheduled times and recording our meetings via Zoom, we were able to check in with questions, receive motivation and learn from observation notes taken by my team. This dissertation was incredibly challenging and could not be done by one person alone, we only made it this far because of our site team and our ability to let go (be led by the Spirit). My development was painful and traumatic

but rewarding. We learn to let go of things that no longer serve us and to acknowledge our humanity.

**Competencies Chosen for Development**

Competency Six: *Facilitating Transformation*

We chose this competency because transformation is not something we control but instead is something we come into relationship with. Out of all 14 competencies, this competency was the most challenging to vulnerably answer. Our efforts will be measured by the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of our *fruits of labor*. How can we improve our own ability to host and journey with others through transformation? [Post-research] We find our Self reimagining and understanding transformation differently. We naively approached transformation in the beginning of this project in a very colonized and binary way: we believed that we could affect people in such a way that transformation would be instant or within the given time for research. It's through my trials and errors or failures that we understand transformation to be something beyond time. Traumatized people transform when they feel ready or think they are ready. The most we could offer any traumatized person was a digitally spiritual listening space hosted by an authentically empathetic Self exploring individual (a *Path-Maker*) (see Chapter 4: Outcome-Public|Space). Through my actions and example (advocating), others who are religiously traumatized can see how one may go about walking an unfollowable path. We cannot make these choices for people; they must choose for themselves (free-will). So, we learned that natural facilitating requires authenticity and humility. By just showing up as our authentic Self, we inspired (facilitated) transformation.

Competency Ten: *Spiritual Leader*

We chose this competency because being a *Spiritual Leader* isn't mastered but instead is a process we can improve. Out of all 14 competencies, this competency was the most spiritually vulnerable process in the project. Our efforts will be measured by our journey (our walk) and how we influence others. How can we improve our practice of spirituality to express things constantly changing in and around us? [Post-research] As we look back on the many Theopoetic miles we have travelled since the beginning of this project, we acknowledge the changes in our *spiritual walk/hike*. We have adopted and embodied a meta-spiritual practice that supports my multi-faith journey. We started separating from absolute egocentric human ideas perpetuated by non-inclusive interpretations of colonized myths and started free falling into a Between | Space by embodying a meta-spirituality.[112] We embody meta-spirituality in three ways: [1] the journeying of an unfollowable path, [2] a relatively authentic connection with an inner Source (God) and [3] the exploration of Self[113] in community with others journeying towards Self/Source. We embody an ever expanding and inclusive relationship between Self and an eternally unchanging Source of Vibration (God). This change in our spirituality has given life to a *Path-Maker* style of leadership in a multi-faith context (see Chapter 4: Plan of Implementation- Public|Space).

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[112] Robin Van Den Akker, et al., *Metamodernism - Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism* (NY: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 10. [metaxy] A sense of in-betweenness. - between the divine and the mortal.

[113] Smith, Jung *and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred*, 120. The archetypal Self, as we have noted, is not the center of the field of consciousness (i.e., it is not the ego), but is a deeper organizing principle to which ego-consciousness must become related.

# Chapter 6: Final Thoughts

In our human attempt to identify and communicate our multi-faith ministerial challenge, we used Theopoetics as a methodological framework to articulate religious trauma. As a 21st century Theopoet, we co-created Theopoetic expressions for millennials found among the religiously traumatized and dehumanized population- taking shape in between and among humans existing beyond the practice of harmful religion, like a colonized Christianity in Amerika. When challenged with the rise of religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika, we responded with a faithful action; advocating for those who are and have been religiously traumatized when opposing or not conforming to a colonized religion like Christianity in Amerika. It's in our faithful actions that we experienced failure and success. We naively started this project with expectations based on the available/collected data. We quickly learned that we needed to adjust and change in order to authentically serve and share community with a religiously traumatized group of people.

We learned how colonization is working in the background of our project. Most, if not all the people who engaged and participated with the Between | Space dissertation were challenged with identifying Self and navigating life beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." We didn't understand how much religion influences humanity and people's choices. We wanted to create something similar but not the same- something religiously traumatized people could use as a bridge or temporary aid station; we quickly

realized our ego was intertwined into this desire to help people and this projection of a healer. We as the observer and facilitator had to *let go*, so that we could better understand the complex issue as well as our Self in relation to these complex issues. The perfectionist in me was challenged by the idea of not being in control, but we soon realized *letting go* doesn't mean that. We were afraid to fail and so, our ego stepped in to protect us. By *letting go*, we were able to see what was right in front of us and over the eight months of research we started embodying more and more of the project; we started spiritually evolving. The concept and archetype of the *Path-Maker* was me looking in *a mirror* and acknowledging that we don't have to be pure or perfect (colonized/whiteness/Good Christian)- instead we are in a process and possess the potential to do and be unimaginable things (loving myself/ Self). By doing this, my relationships improved or ended; people either empathized or felt threatened, people either loved me more or started hating me. We have less friends now in comparison to the start of this project (2-3 years ago).

My multi-faith/meta-spiritual journey of Self-development simultaneously pushes people away and pulls people toward me. My religious trauma has acted as an invisible prison; imprisoning me for so long, until we realized that the key to my invisible prison was me changing my perspective. We started to see our religious trauma as a tool of advocacy that can help others see they are not alone. This journey (project) was spiritually, mentally, and physically draining due to me putting my entire being (Self) into an unknowable process with an unknowable outcome, no map or tools to orientate other than our intuition, faith, willingness to go deeper and an artistic perspective. In terms of failure and success, we failed a lot; that's the only way we were able to

ultimately succeed. To be clear, our success is in the understanding; we understand more after three years of focusing on how to better understand a problem so that we may co-create a temporary solution. We realized that Public|Space as a community may be too early for religiously traumatized people newly exploring life beyond "The Four Walls of Colonized Religion." Eight months wasn't enough to affect people on a deeper level to cause life changing effects. However, we do believe that we planted seeds in people, with hope that they will water it themselves and provide adequate sun light to experience the harvest.

Everyone in Between | Space was challenged by everyday distractions and prior colonized conditioning. Religiously traumatized people found it hard to love their Self, be consistent, be present, have faith, trust their intuition and be disciplined. We experienced more projections from fear of something new or different than actual appreciation for being recognized and listened to. We finally concluded that most religiously traumatized people who reside in a city environment aren't looking for another group to meet up or to replace Church; they are desperately looking for rest, stability, and security. These individuals are still processing trauma in their own way and may not be emotionally intelligent enough or privileged enough to process their religious traumas and the feelings that a rise. We also realized that anything we did was being compared to Christianity and its beliefs due to everyone in the project being from a Christian hegemony like Amerika. So, with all that said, we failed a lot so that we may achieve very little success. Our next steps are not to unify many under one, but instead journey towards Source/Self and leave behind a trail. Stepping off-path is what makes someone become a *Path-Maker*, but the wisdom from your trails is what makes you a *Living Symbol*; that's what we have learned.

# APPENDICES

# Appendix A: Proposal

BETWEEN | SPACE

By

AARON C. WALDRON, M.Div.

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

New York Theological Seminary

2023

**Challenge Statement**

We are a practicing Shaman who has been called out of religion to journey with religiously traumatized humans who have separated from colonized religions in Amerika. Millennials who leave a colonized Christianity often experience unresolved religious trauma and are ostracized by their Christofascist faith community. This demonstration project will co-create a series of relative, restorative and revolutionary spaces that creates community for religiously traumatized millennials to begin healing religious trauma; we propose Between | Space.

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## Chapter I: Introduction to the Setting

In our[1] human attempt to identify and communicate our multi-faith ministerial challenge, we will be using Theopoetics as a methodological framework to articulate religious trauma. As a 21st century theopoet, we humbly and audaciously offer a theopoetic expression of our non-traditional multi-faith ministerial setting; found among the religiously traumatized and dehumanized- taking shape in between and among humans existing beyond the practice of a colonized[2] Christianity in Amerika. [3] Our setting exists among religiously traumatized millennials who are between the ages of 26 to 41 in 2022 C.E. (see Figure 1). Among millennials are those who have voluntarily and involuntarily separated from a colonized Christianity in Amerika and are experiencing religious trauma. Our ongoing research suggests that humans among the millennial demographic who are migrating from a colonized Christianity in Amerika are increasing over time (see Figure 5 & 6). When challenged with the rise of religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika, we respond with a theopoetic expression that resembles those

[1] My pronouns are *they*, *their* and *them*. We do not identify in the singular first-person pronoun (I), but instead, we identify as a collective third person pronoun (we). Throughout this dissertation, we will use illeism to refer to our Self as *me, us, ours* and *we*.

[2] Colonization is the act of establishing political, physical, spiritual and mental control over another conscious being or a group of conscious beings.

[3] Amerika is spelled with a "K" to emphasize the German etymology of the word that suggest imitation of a Nazi governed country that further implies a fascist nation.

who are and have been religiously traumatized when opposing or not conforming to a colonized Christianity. [4]

**The Copernicans: Religiously Traumatized Millennials.**

In 1632 C.E. the late Italian astronomer, physicist and engineer Galileo Galilei published a book called *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. In this book, there is a dialogue between two symbolic characters, *Salviati* and *Simplicio*. Salviati theopoetically symbolized the Copernican heliocentric (Sun-centered) theory of the Universe, while Simplicio theopoetically symbolized the Ptolemaic/Aristotelian geocentric (Earth-centered) theory. This Renaissance period (1400 C.E.-1600 C.E.) was critiqued and understood through a religious understanding of the world and how it works; Europe and its collective countries/territories were conquered and united by a powerfully influential religion known today as Christianity. Europe became a Christian hegemony[5] that fascistly dictated how society was governed and what people believed to be true or sacred during the 16th century. By the end of the 16th century, Christianity gave rise to a historically religious war that lasted 30 years: the *Thirty Years' War* was one of the most destructive wars in European history because between 1618 C.E. to 1648 C.E., almost 8-12 million people died. During this period of time, Galileo audaciously

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[4] See Chapter Two for a more in-depth theopoetic analysis.

[5] Susan Arai and B. Dana Kivel, "Critical Race Theory and Social Justice Perspectives on Whiteness, Difference(S) and (Anti)Racism: A Fourth Wave of Race Research in Leisure Studies," *Journal of Leisure Research* 41, no. 4 (December 2009): 459–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2009.11950185. Christian hegemony refers to the normalization of Christian values, beliefs and practices, as well as the positive and privileged platform individuals of Christian faith are afforded through institutional discourse and design.

disagreed with the politically powerful colonized Christian Churches views and their biblical text that suggested God's design was to have the Earth be the center of the Universe.[6] "Galileo was a man caught between shadow and substance, in that liminal space where the world was changing:"[7] a Between | Space.

In 1633 C.E., Pope Urban VIII (a symbol of leadership in a colonized Christianity) found Galileo *vehemently suspect of heresy* and sentenced him to indefinite house arrest for his perspective of a heliocentric Universe.[8] A modern-day colonized Christianity continues to demonstrate the Ptolemaic view of the Universe regardless of what science, humanism, mysticism and religiously traumatized humans have offered in opposition to a colonized interpretation and preservation of God's inspired words that were written in the Bible: "[God] You set the earth on its foundations so that it shall never be shaken." (Psalm 104:5 NRSV) "The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises." (Ecclesiastes 1:5 NRSV) However, today more and more religiously traumatized millennials theopoetically view the colonized practices of Christianity as still practicing Ptolemaic views in the 21st century, except in a slightly different way that happens to be religiously traumatizing to many millennials (Copernicans) in Amerika. Instead of upholding an Earth-centered view, colonized Christianity has theopoetically transitioned to a Church-centered view. Colonized Churches have become the universal

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[6] John Seel, Jr., *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2018), xvii.

[7] Ibid.

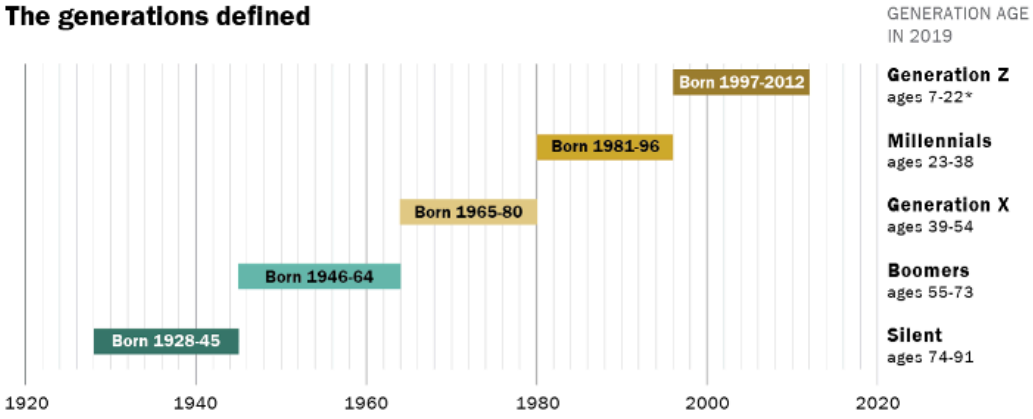
[8] Albert Van Helden, "Galileo - Galileo's Copernicanism," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Galileo-Galilei/Galileos-Copernicanism.

focus so much that its practitioners are theopoetically the exploited Sun as described in the book of Ecclesiastes 1:5 NRSV; "we are expected to rise and fall and reset daily for [a colonized Church]."

The Universe is expected to continue transforming while a colonized Church remains the same, *not relative to* or *in relationship with* humans in process. This implies that a colonized Christianity is perfect, made without error and doesn't need to change. Millennials experiencing religious trauma can be seen as a relatively new generation of Copernicans emerging and evolving in Amerika, looking for authentic relationships and something indescribably beyond human understanding (God, Creator of all things). John Seel confirms the identity of religiously traumatized millennials as Copernican's, when he describes them as those who are experiencing and navigating life in a way that is relatively different than their spiritual ancestors and colonized Christianity. This shift in perspective is a theopoetic example of how to identify the religiously traumatized millennials in our setting. The idea of humans going from a geocentric perspective to a heliocentric perspective of the Universe not only makes them an audacious heretic in the eyes of a colonized Christianity but also traumatically affects how humans make choices, experience their environment, socialize, process emotions and have a relationship with God.[9]

[9] Ibid.

Figure 1: The Generations Defined (Pew Research Center)




According to the Pew Research Center, "anyone born between 1981 C.E. and 1996 C.E. (ages 26 to 41 in 2022 C.E.) is considered a Millennial"[10] and were conceived towards the end of the last millennium (see Figure 1). They are a byproduct of technological advancements that revolutionized the world as we know it today. Imagine the many parts of life that are affected and or controlled by the internet; millennials were emotionally and physically developing when so many changes were happening in Amerika. Most millennials remember and have been traumatized by the 2001 C.E. organized terrorist attacks of 9/11: a series of four coordinated suicide terrorist attacks carried out by a militant Islamic extremist group called al-Qaeda.

[10] Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

The *September 11th Attacks* uniquely affected millennials (ages 6 to 21 in 2002 C.E.), on a spectrum from childhood trauma to career changes. In 2002 C.E. children in first grade and young adults starting their new careers were living during a time in Amerika when society was being introduced to the first form of internet (web 1.0) and its social networking platforms like Myspace, Facebook and AOL Instant Messenger. Technologies like Dial-up internet (web 1.0), Bluetooth, the cell phone, or Motorola's iconic two-way messenger changed how humans in the early millennium communicated and interacted with the world around them. Most Millennials (ages 12 to 27 in 2008 C.E.) experienced the economic recession of 2008 C.E. in the U.S.; either the seventh grader's parents or the 27-year-old adult navigating life independently or married (family orientated). Many may have lost their job because of this crisis or were forced to change or study a different career to make a living. This also implies millennials going back to school to study a different career or furthering their degree. This information allows us to see how versatile and traumatized a generation of humans like millennials are before even considering the ones religiously traumatized. The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting embody "openness, the move from dweller to explorer, from someone who presumes to have a corner on truth to one who is continually learning and growing."[11]

In our setting, theopoetically, the religiously traumatized Copernican's (religiously traumatized millennials) are looking for "community and personalized

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[11] John Seel, Jr., 121.

attention [relationship]."[12] They are modern-day Copernicans who often believe that reality is essentially relational. They think and believe, everything is a relationship, or is in a relationship and the "Universe is a verb, a process of ceaseless activity [everything has a vibration and is moving]."[13] They are looking for authenticity, which is "not a description that you can use for yourself; it is an affirmation given by others [in community]."[14] Finally, the Copernican's who make up our setting have "an innate restlessness stemming from an acute awareness of an existential disconnect between what is and what ought to be."[15] They are theopoetically modern-day prophets: poetic messengers delivering wisdom and divine information from the deepest depths of the eternal Abyss: God. The religiously traumatized Spirit of Copernican's is asking for mutual authenticity, trust and humility; it isn't interested in absoluteness, arrogance, slavery, or perpetuated lies for the "greater good."

> The measure of leadership is best seen in times of crucial decision. [Religiously traumatized] millennials carry a new [perspective] on reality that poses a major challenge to the Church in the coming years; this new frame is not only different, it is [relatively] better. Like the iceberg warning to the Titanic, it should not be ignored. Through knowledge of this [religiously traumatized perspective] shift and all it entails, Church leaders can learn how to navigate these uncharted waters. First, we turn to examine what often cannot be seen – the importance of [perspectives], how to navigate between them and the cost if we do not.[16]

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[12] Ibid, 133.
[13] Ibid, 140.
[14] Ibid, 146.
[15] Ibid, 181.
[16] Ibid, 1.

Due to our setting taking place among religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika, its crucial to attempt in understanding their perspectives and experiences with a colonized Christianity. Their perspectives and experiences have informed their choices to begin migrating from an ancient religious belief system and its selected "sacred" perspectives. Now that we have an idea of who millennials are and the religiously traumatized millennials in our setting, let us begin analyzing some possibilities as to why religiously traumatized millennials are migrating from a colonized Christianity in Amerika during the 21st century.

**A Millennial Migration**

In 1999 C.E., Gallup: a global analytics and advisement firm, collected data that suggested 70% of U.S. citizens were practicing Abrahamic faith and belonged to a Church, Synagogue, or Mosque. However, "in 2020 C.E., [Gallup collected data that suggested] 47% of U.S. [citizens] belonged to a Church, Synagogue or Mosque."[17] This shows us that over the course of two decades, humans in the U.S. have been separating from religions like Christianity in relatively significant numbers. This information offers Christianity an opportunity for accountability and humility; those hurt by religion are on a relative path of healing and yearn for *human depthiness*. A theopoetic pulling from beyond the four walls of the Church is what traumatized millennials are experiencing.

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[17] Gallup Inc, "U.S. Church Membership Falls below Majority for First Time," Gallup.com, March 29, 2021, news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

Based on recent surveys from Gallup, we see that millennial's Church membership in the U.S. has been declining. This decline in Church membership and belonging to an Abrahamic faith like Christianity is evidence that millennials are indeed migrating at an increasing and alarming rate (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Changes in Church Membership by Generation, Over Time. (Gallup)

Changes in Church Membership by Generation, Over Time

| | 1998-2000 | 2008-2010 | 2018-2020 | Change since 1998-2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | % | pct. pts. |
| Traditionalists (born before 1946) | 77 | 73 | 66 | -11 |
| Baby boomers (born 1946-1964) | 67 | 63 | 58 | -9 |
| Generation X (born 1965-1980) | 62 | 57 | 50 | -12 |
| Millennials (born 1981-1996) | n/a | 51 | 36 | n/a |

Note: Given that Gallup's polls are based on the 18+ U.S. adult population, the 1980-2000 period would have included only a small proportion of the millennial generation, and the 2018-2020 period includes only a small proportion of Generation Z (born after 1996).

GALLUP

In 2018 C.E., The Pew Research Center started collecting data on how U.S. citizens identified themselves within a Christian hegemony Nation: Amerika. An inquiry triggered by significant changes in how humans identified as *Christian*, *Atheist,* or *None* in Amerika. A year later, the Pew Research Center unknowingly revealed a part of the migration of religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika when they collected data that suggested a relatively large increase within one year. Between 2018 C.E. & 2019 C.E.,

the survey reflected an increase from 17% to 26% of humans who identified as *None*.[18] This survey reveals a questionable change in how humans religiously identify in Amerika (see Figure 3 & 4). The increase of humans who rather identify as *None* over *Christian* is curiously questionable and alarming. We offer a rhetorical question: what happened in Amerika that affected religiously traumatized millennials and their religious practices in such a way that they would begin to experience a lack of safety, freedom, or spiritual connection in a religious space and or practice?

Many religiously traumatized millennials continue to be misunderstood in a colonized Christian hegemony country like Amerika; a theopoetic incubator for a rapidly growing 21st Century Amerikan trend of migrating from a colonized Christianity (see Figure 5). Many religiously traumatized millennials embody a relationship between colonization and Christianity. It's this theopoetic marriage between Christianity and colonization (Christofascist[19]) that is a *fascist*[20] *authority* subconsciously enforcing and perpetuating a colonized religious criterion for humans on Earth designed out of fear to control. This audaciously inhuman act of colonization[21] and practice of Christian purity

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[18] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, October 17, 2019, www.pewforum.org (accessed Feb 1, 2022).

[19] Christofascism, a neologism which was coined in 1970 by the late liberation theologian, Dorothee Sölle.

[20] An authoritarian hierarchical government or structure of power (the Church) who dictates and controls the members of the government or structure (the Body-the People).

[21] The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. This can be achieved physically (slavery), mentally (social influence-laws) and this can be done spiritually (religion).

culture[22] is causing religious trauma in many millennials living in Amerika. Colonized Christian practitioners have historically used religious doctrine and the Bible to justify and dictate what is right or wrong for all humans living in not just a Christian hegemony nation like Amerika but globally. The colonized Churches imperialistic embodiment of *ancient fascist patriarchal traditions of power*[23] is a part of why so many religiously traumatized millennials have migrated to seek safety and healing beyond organized religion in Amerika.

The Barna Group is an evangelical Christian polling firm based in Ventura, California. They aim to provide spiritual influencers with credible knowledge for critical thinking and enable them to navigate a complex and changing culture. The Barna Group defines an unchurched person as "someone who has not attended a Christian Church service."[24] Simply put, Barna Group is saying that a churched human is connected, even if only tangentially to a church and unchurched humans are completely disconnected from Christianity.[25] Barna goes on to identify four sub demographics within the unchurched population: 49% actively churched, 8% minimally churched, 33% de-churched and 10% purely unchurched. This religious trauma project will focus on humans within what Barna considers 33% of de-churched (see Figure 6) because Barna

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[22] A subculture of evangelical Christianity. The idea that you must be pure to enter into heaven. Being pure is determined by Christian values. Purity culture is exclusive and absolute.

[23] This Theopoetic statement is referring to the conception and use of Christianity by the Roman Empire in 313 C.E. Then being integrated into another empire: Amerika. These empires are patriarchal and fascist by nature.

[24] Ibid, 6.

[25] Ibid.

describes this sub-demographic as "those who have been churched in the past but are currently on hiatus. -The de-churched are the fastest growing segment, presently one-third of the population."[26] Barna Group, a Christian polling firm is saying that humans who are identified as the 33% de-churched are on "hiatus;" basically saying religiously traumatized millennials are taking a vacation from religion and religion is inevitably the right way. Not only is this choice in words offensive, but belittling. Religiously traumatized millennials who choose to separate from religion, such as a colonized Christianity, are not taking a vacation but, instead, are searching for a relatively deeper connection with God that can bring about healing and personal development.

Barna's data states that the de-churched is a relatively small group and believes "when a group is [this] small, it can be fairly homogeneous. The way that most groups grow (religious or not) is through personal connections, not because of grand, macro-level shifts in philosophical or political sensibilities."[27] Two out of three humans in Amerika claim they are spiritual, yet half believe there is no point to personally attending Church (see Figure 7). Our setting focuses on the many religiously traumatized millennials who are among what Barna considers the de-churched demographic. Remembering what religiously traumatized millennials experienced in Amerika during the '90s, as well as how these events affected and influenced their choices like leaving a colonized Christianity; we must consider that 30% of general millennials in Amerika

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[26] Ibid, 7.

[27] Ryan P Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 69.

struggle to support themselves (poverty), 38% are overwhelmed with student loan repayments (debt), 51% still live at home with their parents or guardian (co-dependent), 44% find it difficult to pay for education and 40% are unemployed, yet 79% possesses college degrees (educated).[28]

Religiously traumatized millennials are overwhelmed with an intersectionality of issues and need relative solutions that service their struggle to endure poverty, debt, over qualifications, codependency and religious trauma. Religiously traumatized millennials seek a genuinely spiritual connection with God: a direct relationship with Source. It's from their challenges and traumas that we witness their developing of an indescribable way to seek something greater: something beyond the four walls of a colonized Church, Synagogue or Mosque.

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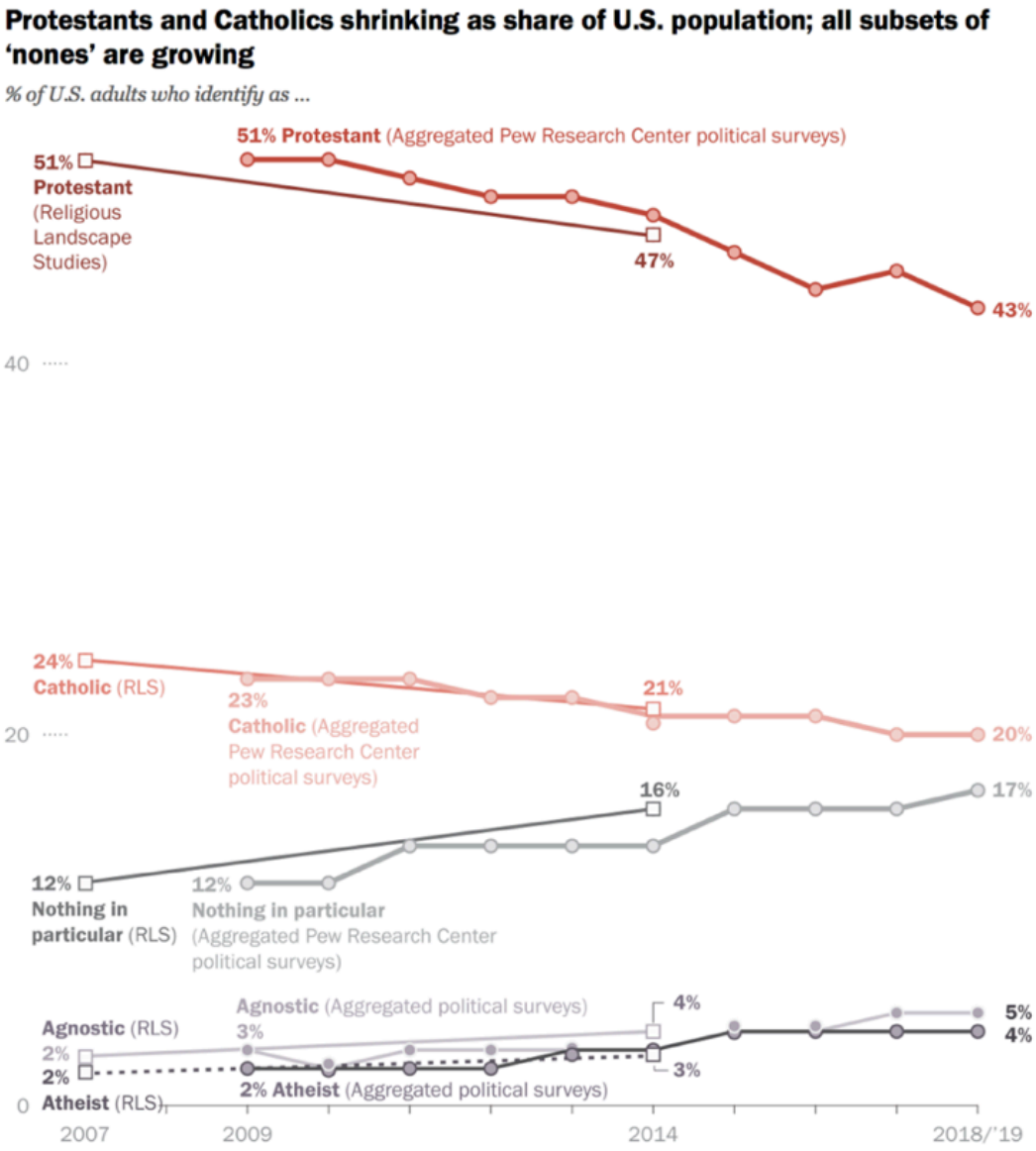
[28] Ibid, 143.

Figure 3: Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone.




Source: Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Studies (2007 and 2014). Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone.
"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"

Figure 4: Large Generational Gap in Amerikan Religion (Pew Research Center)

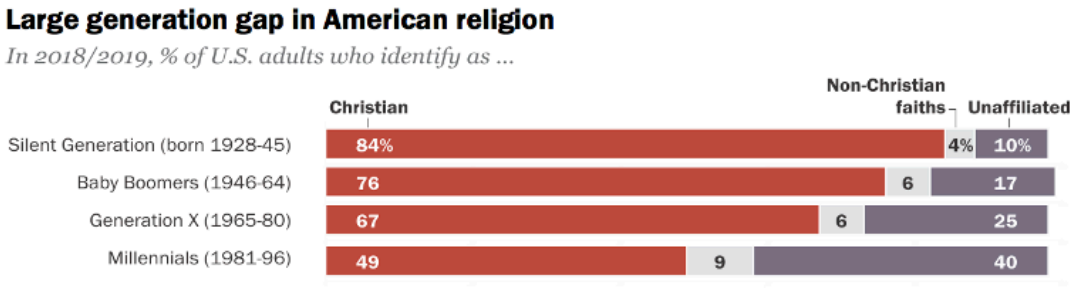



Figure 5: [Seekers] Post-Christian: an increasing trend. (Barna Group)

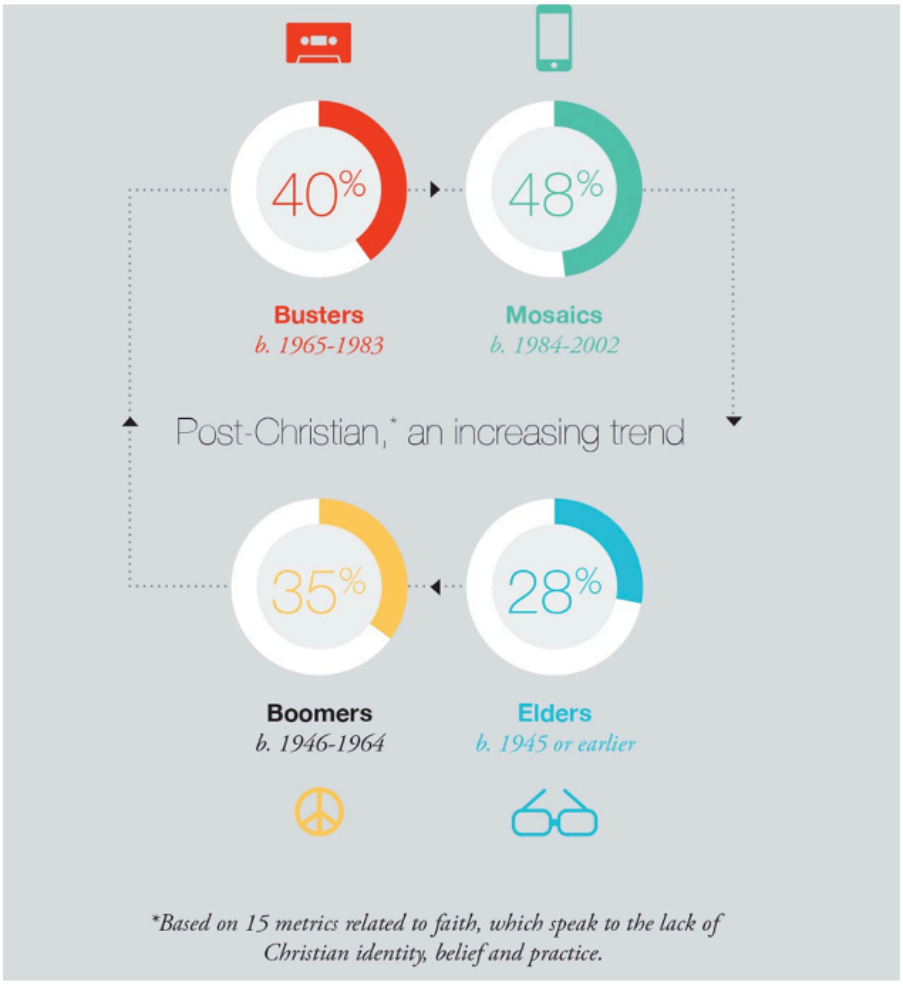



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Figure 6: The Rise of Churchlessness in Amerika (Barna Group)

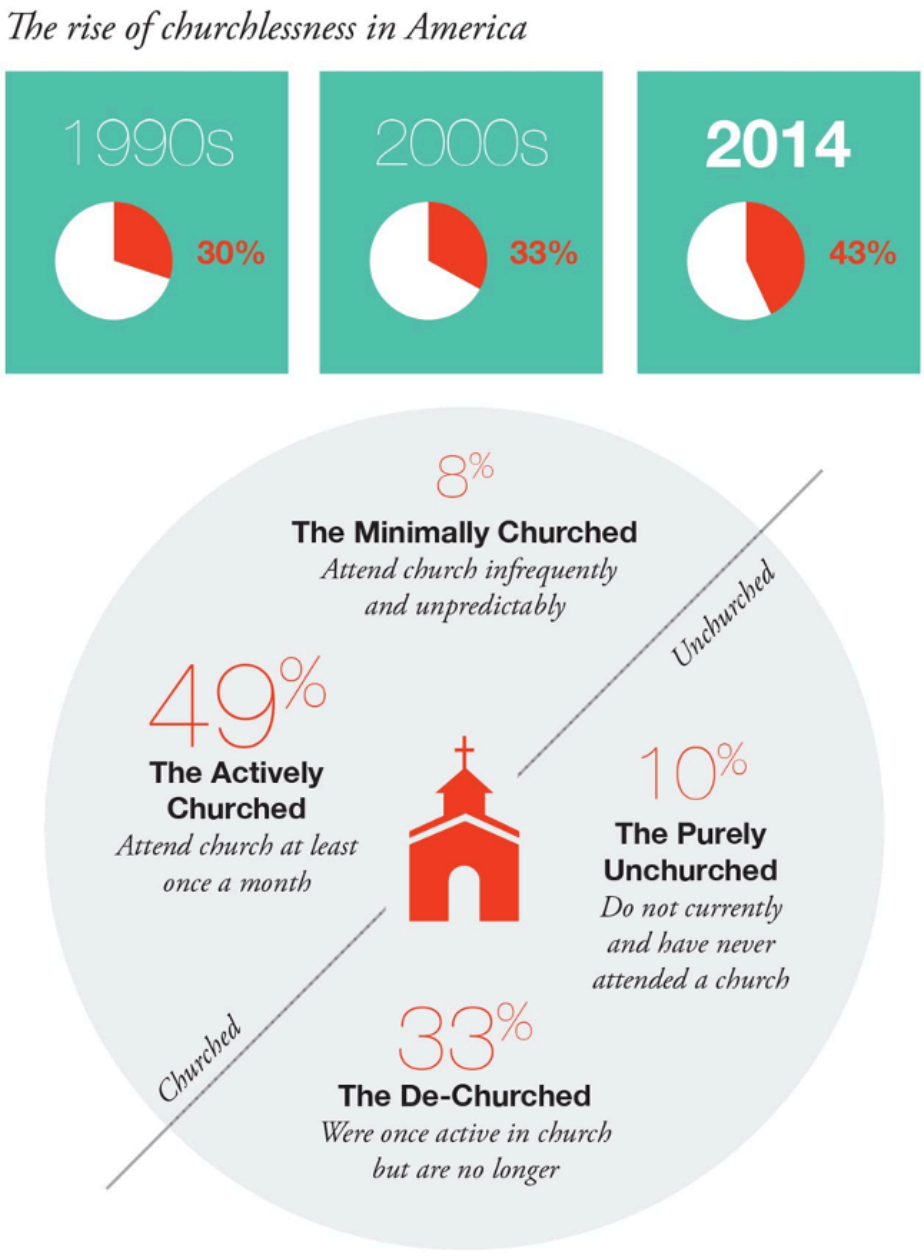
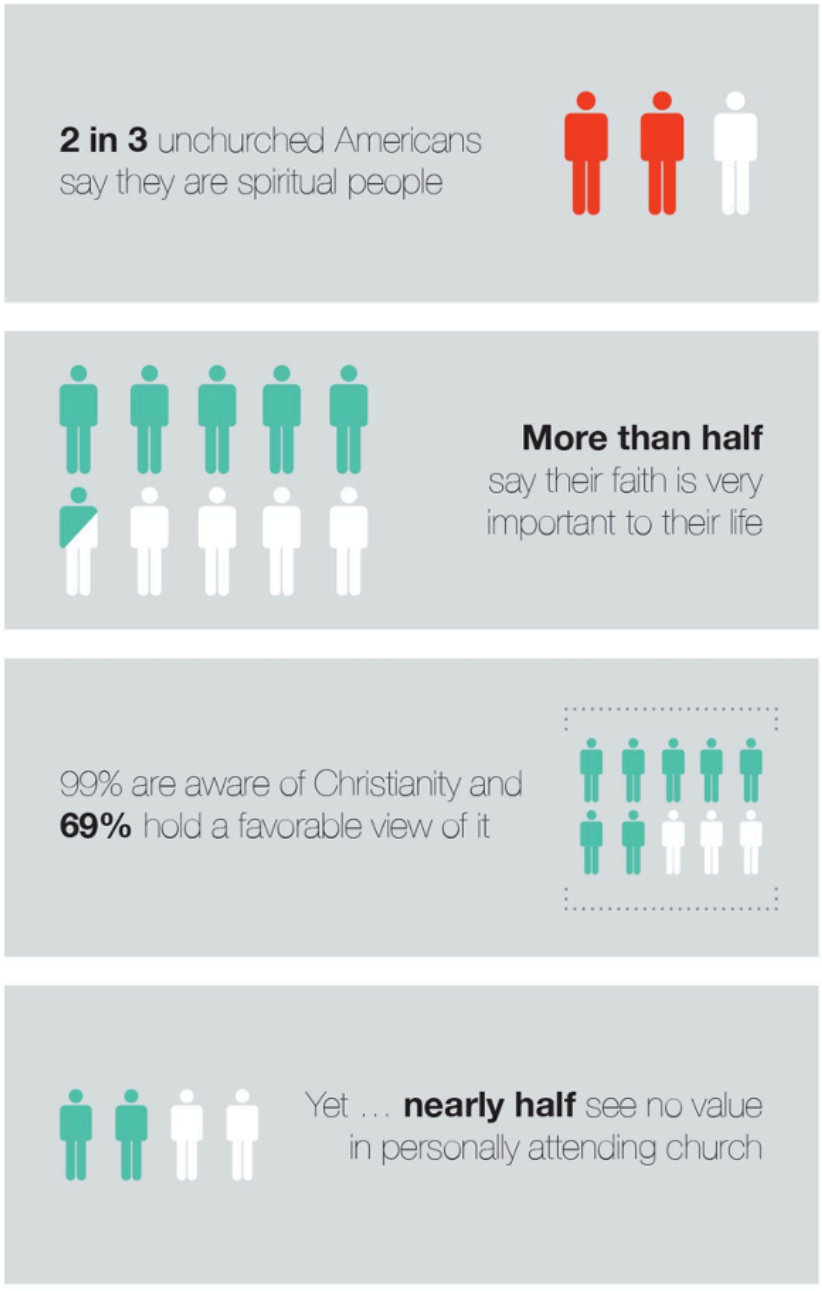


Figure 7: Unchurched Statistics (Barna Group)



**Seekers**

Theopoetically, the religiously traumatized millennials in our setting who have migrated from religion have been searching and seeking for something beyond what can be seen with human eyes. Author D. Patrick Miller writes, "many individuals who identify as [Spiritual But Not Religious] would describe themselves as seekers. -The greatest theological shift is one from God out there to God in here. Likely, as a result of the influence of Eastern traditions, [seekers] generally believe in a God within—representing the greatest human potential available to us all."[29] The millennials in our setting often align more with SBNR because of the numerous possibilities to do something different from what is normal. Whereas religions that have merged with colonization like Christianity are a binary system of faith and worship: its doctrine provides definition, boundaries and limitations between two things; everything is measured between *good & evil*.

Life in a colonized Church is perceived through an absolute past: a focus on an absolute image of God; one way. Whereas life beyond the colonized Church can and is perceived through an unfinished multi-faith process: a focus on journeying an unfollowable path, a mutually immanent relationship with a relative God. The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are more interested in a multi-faith life that reflects a continuous process because freedom then becomes deeply relative and achievable; they

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[29] D. Patrick Miller, "The Rapid Dying of Religion and the Rise of a Universal Spirituality," www.fearlessbooks.com/ReligionDying (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

realize that they aren't as good or bad as they were led to believe through colonized Christian doctrine. They are choosing to practice or pursue a form of connection with God that is considered spiritual but not religious because its relative to their experiences and understandings of how the Universe works (Modern-Day Copernicans).

> According to Dr. Siobhan Chandler, a Victoria-based sociologist of religion, being Spiritual But Not Religious allows you to sidestep the negative assumptions that organized religions are dull and out of touch, incite fear and mistreat women and minorities. Over the past five years, the Spiritual But Not Religious movement has reached critical mass. The term encompasses not only the mind-body-spirit set (think Zoë Kravitz's lumin-ous, bohemian, yoga-practicing character in Big Little Lies) but also anyone who believes that spiritual growth can be furthered outside the confines of organized religion.[30]

We believe that the *Spiritual But Not Religious* (SBNR) movement is an early ember of what has been set ablaze by so many seeker's; humans who choose not to live within the strict and unforgiving boundaries of religion and instead, chooses to instuitively pursue a relatively natural chaotic process of individuation[31] in order to attempt to understand Self more in-depth and its relationship with everything else. There is no one over all reason as to why religiously traumatized millennials in Amerika are leaving colonized religions like a colonized Christianity. However, a Christian Pastor, Jason Jimenez offers an interesting perspective about millennials in his book with Alex McFarland in 2017 C.E. called *Abandoned Faith: a focus on parenting.* Pastor Jimenez

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[30] Katherine Gougeon, "The New New Age: "Spiritual But Not Religious," *FASHION Magazine*, December 2017, fashionmagazine.com/lifestyle/spiritual-but-not-religious/ (accessed Feb 15, 2022).

[31] Edward F Edinger, *Ego and Archetype: Individuation and the Religious Function of the* Psyche (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), 158. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality.

contributes seven key responses from religiously traumatized millennial's when asked the question: why are young people (religiously traumatized millennials) abandoning "the faith" (colonized Christianity)*?*

**Seven Reasons Millennials Are Leaving Christianity:**[32]

1. Many millennials who claim to be Christians never had a true conversion to begin with.
2. The simple fact that a large majority of Christian parents have done a poor job living out their faith and raising their children in the Bible.
3. Doubts about the Bible and common objections about Christianity often get the best of millennials. -young people say they never really felt they could express their doubts and concerns regarding Christianity at home or in the church.
4. Millennials fail to see the connection faith has to culture. When millennials grow up, they have no idea the role faith should play in their careers, personal interests, or future lives.
5. Hypocrisy and compromise in the church play a significant role in many millennials abandoning the faith.
6. The majority of millennials are biblically illiterate.

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[32] Alex Mcfarland and Jason Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2017), 27-32.

7. Millennials have never actually been taught about life, work, death, and resurrection of [Yeshua] Christ.

Pastor Jimenez offers us an opportunity to process theopoetically what has happened between children (religiously traumatized millennials) and the colonized Church (theopoetic Parent/Mother symbol) by focusing on the parents and how Christianity has been understood as well as experienced through them. "Parents are the most influential and most powerful force in a child's life."[33] Pastor Jimenez contributes a crucial point to the understanding of why religiously traumatized millennials are migrating from religion. How religiously traumatized millennials parents or symbols of authority practiced and discipled them (colonized them) has a large part to do with why they are migrating from colonized religion in relatively large numbers. The most religiously traumatized millennials believe that a colonized Christianity was given or forced on to them, they didn't willingly choose to practice colonized Christianity, they were left without a choice.

The Copernican's in our setting tend to see the colonized Church as an irrelevant relic of the past.[34] "The [colonized] Churches don't really impact their surroundings because, other than maintaining a building, the [humans] who go there don't connect with the [humans] outside its four walls."[35] Pastor Jimenez says: "Relationships have always been at the heart of the gospel and how we share the Good News of [Yeshua]. –

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[33] Ibid, 32.
[34] Ibid, 57.
[35] Ibid.

[colonized] Churches do not naturally facilitate relationships."[36] The Copernican's in our setting need space as well as the opportunity to develop community and an authentic relationship with a God within: Self. Our setting pleads with us to theopoetically dive into the depths of our multi-faith ministerial challenge: to co-create spaces for religiously traumatized millennials to start healing religious trauma; we propose Between|Space's.

[36] Ibid, 58.

## Chapter II: Preliminary Analysis of The Challenge

My name is Aaron Christopher Michael Chengte (chan-tay) Waldron; we are a religiously traumatized theopoet: a Shaman in journey. Our pronouns are *they*, *their* and *them*. We do not identify in the singular first-person pronoun (I), but instead, we identify as a collective third person pronoun (we). Throughout this dissertation, we will use illeism to refer to our Self as *me, us, ours* and *we*. Our primary method of expression and analysis is Theopoetics; a theo-philosophical aesthetic method that developed out of the 1960's *Death of God theology*[37] or *Radical Theology.*[38] Theopoetics is a hermeneutical framework that is liberating by nature and aims to bring into relationship the embodiment and the numinous (Sacredness/Divinity) through poetry. We imagine Theopoetics as a poetically theological and spiritual method of empathizing, communicating and relating to an indescribable God. A relatively sacred (numinous) language that intimately brings pieces of poetic analysis, theology, mythology, spirituality and meta-modernity together momentarily to attempt to describe the indescribable. The combining of the two Greek

[37] In 1961, Gabriel Vahanian's published a book called, The Death of God. Vahanian argued that modern secular culture had lost all sense of the sacred, lacking any sacramental meaning, no transcendental purpose or sense of providence. He concluded that for the modern mind "God is dead".

[38] A contemporary theological movement challenging traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs about God and asserting that human beings must take moral as well as spiritual accountability/responsibility for themselves.

words: *theo* (θεό) and *poiein* (ποίησις) creates a symbol, expression and way of life that means: *to make or shape relating to God or deities.*

A theopoetic expression is one that "reveals some aspect of the divine"[39]in all things to include a 21st Century religiously traumatized theopoet: a Shaman in Journey. We have been shaped and molded by our traumas but also by theopoetic *pillars* like, the late Brazilian poet, theologian, philosopher and psychoanalyst, Rubem A. Alves who offered a creative and imaginative way of mixing poetry, prayer, mysticism, and theology together. This poetically theological interpretation was manifested by Alves when he wrote a paper called: "next to the rivers of Babylon" while at Union Theological Seminary in 1964 C.E. Alves wrote in a way that allowed him to express and articulate the difficult and traumatizing revolutionary processes occurring in his home country. Alves theopoetic interpretations helped us see how our own human experiences and traumas relate to theological and philosophical beliefs. We feel comforted by his way of expression in his books, *Tomorrows Child*[40] and a *Theology of Human Hope.*[41]

The late French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard offered a theopoetic perspective and exploration of the phenomenology of imagination in order to clarify the term *poetic image*. In his book, the *Poetics of Space,*[42] Bachelard focuses on describing and expressing through architectural symbols in poetry. He offers a reimagining of how

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[39] L. B. C. Keefe-Perry, "Theopoetics: Process and Perspective," *Christianity & Literature* 58, no. 4 (September 2009): 579–601, https://doi.org/10.1177/014833310905800404.

[40] Rubem A. Alves, *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011).

[41] Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (St. Meinrad, IN: Abby Press, 1972).

[42] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

imagination is in relationship with space that occupies Spirit and meaning. Bachelard goes on to further explore how that very same space that is filled with imagination, Spirit and meanings also evokes feelings, memories and fantasies. He believed that no actual space could satisfy the poetic imagination and so, this idea unlocked our mind from an ancient human prison of a colonized perspective. Through Theopoetics, we choose to see our Self as a poetic image: an inter-dimensionally infinite process that will never be done. This keeps us humble, true and accountable to the things outside of our human control, to include God.

The late British mathematician and philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead offered an idea that suggest reality consists of *processes* rather than material objects and that *processes* are best defined by their relations with other *processes*. This means that nothing can be defined or understood separate (alone) from anything else, all things are interconnected and form a *collective*. It's through his books, *Process and Reality*[43] as well as *Symbolism: its meaning and effect*,[44] that we are inspired by the concept of mutual immanence; it helped to shape our theopoetic imagination to imagine how humans are living symbols that are affected by God as much as God is affected by living symbols. We feel empowered by the notion that life is a series of processes and nothing really ends but transforms. Whitehead influences the formation of our theopoetic eschatology: the

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[43] Alfred North Whitehead, et al., *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, corrected* (New York: The Free Press, 1985).

[44] Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect: Barbour-Page Lectures, University of Virginia, 1927* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985).

considerate and artistic study of the alpha & omega (beginning and end) of a process or collection of processes at any particular point in time, free from binary and colonized ways of understanding process.

The late Romanian historian of religion and philosopher, Mircea Eliade explored the universal structures (ways of thinking) of religious experience that are shared across all human cultures. Eliade proposed that the central "thing" uniting all religions is the experience of the sacred (numinous), a divine life force/energy. In Eliade's books, *the Sacred & the Profane: the nature of religion*[45] as well as *Images & Symbols: studies in religious symbolism*;[46] he stretched us to believe experiences of the sacred emerge from hierophanies: manifestations of the sacred within the human experience such as through ritual, dreams, or nature.

Finally, the late Swiss Jungian psychologist and scholar, Dr. Marie-Louise von Franz contributed a holistic imagination that influenced us to feel the need to keep an inter-dimensional connection between matter, Spirit and the unconscious. By not considering the inter-dimensionality of these aspects of reality, humanity risk being colonized by dogma, regulation and facts: fascistly confined by absolute concepts and absolute truths. In her book, *Alchemy: an introduction to the symbolism and the*

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[45] Mircea Eliade, et al., *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Book, 1987).

[46] Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (London: Harvill, 1961).

*psychology*,[47] she reminds us of how open we should be as theopoetic analyst attempting to make sense of indescribable trauma like millennials religious trauma.

These theopoetic *pillars* have shaped and held together how we embody and experience Theopoetics in the 21st Century. Our religious traumas have inspired us to seek, create and develop our own theopoetic language to express and communicate relatively new meanings, symbols and myths out of a journey of religious trauma healing. Theopoetics empowers us to temporarily express, analyze and reveal the fragile truths of an indescribable God in a mutually immanent[48] relationship with all things. Our theopoetic *pillars* empower us to identify, analyze, empathize and express sacredness beyond spaces socially designated as sacred or safe like a colonized Christian Church in Amerika. As a 21st century theopoet, we are gravitationally pulled into relationship with religiously traumatized millennials. It's through our *being pulled* that we use our own experiences, spirituality, imagination and religious trauma to theopoetically express and advocate for a community of humans who are religiously traumatized and are navigating life beyond a colonized Christianity. We are one example or testimony of the many who suffer from religious trauma and navigate life beyond a colonized Christianity in Amerika. Theopoetically through me as a *living symbol* of religious trauma and experiences, you are given the opportunity to witness as well as empathize with

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[47] Marie-Luise Von Franz, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980).

[48] Andrew M. Davis, *Mind, Value, and Cosmos. On the Relational Nature of Ultimacy*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Pub, 2021. 199. God, and the world also remain mutually transcendent such that any world happening owes it to its existence its own actualization as its own decision of unification of its relationality.

religiously traumatized millennials and their choice to migrate from a colonized Christianity in Amerika.

Theopoetically, we are what Buddhism refers to as a *Bodhisattva:*[49] one who becomes a *forest-dweller* (Vanaprasthi). A *Bodhisattva* is a human in journey to becoming a Buddha (relatively the highest state of human consciousness and healing) "but who renounces entry to Nirvana [beyond time-Heaven] in order to help other beings [like religiously traumatized millennials] through compassion or empathy with their suffering [: religious trauma]. This compassion creates a deep resolve to assist others to become free from the wheel of Samsara [daily life & suffering]."[50] We are unapologetically a Shaman in journey because we desperately yearn to experience and understand the many sorrows and sufferings of religious trauma in daily life. We are a Shaman who has theopoetically been pulled out of a colonized Christianity to journey with religiously traumatized humans who have migrated from relatively harmful religious spaces and practices. Recent research shows that there is a significant number of millennials migrating from Christianity in Amerika due to unresolved religious trauma experienced within a *colonized Christian faith community* (a state of consciousness) (see Figure 9-10). Religiously traumatized millennials often find it difficult to encounter therapeutic and inclusive spaces to seek relative healing. We have observed religiously traumatized millennials rising interest in experiencing and understanding God through a

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[49] Śāntideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008).
[50] Ron Geaves, *Key Words in Buddhism* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006),

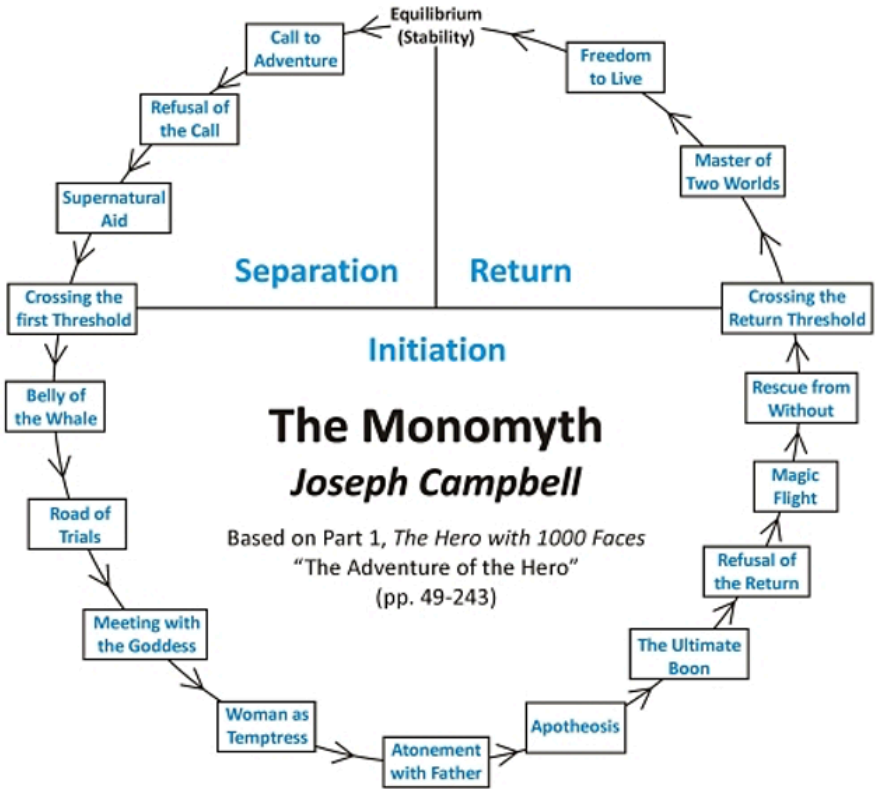
meta-spiritual: relational perspective beyond the four walls of a colonized Church. This project will attempt to co-create a series of relative, restorative and revolutionary spaces that invite humans to an online meta-spiritual community that empowers multi-faith as well as religiously traumatized millennials to start healing unresolved religious trauma. We aim to co-create spaces that allow religiously traumatized humans to develop a personal relationship with a God within: Self; we propose Between | Space.

Theopoetically, Between | Space will offer humans an opportunity to reconnect with their Self and understand their Self in a relatively healthier way. This process will initiate what Joseph Campbell calls: a *Hero's Journey* or *monomyth*[51] (see Figure 8) and does not require a Bible, a blood sacrifice, doctrine or being colonized. Based on how religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are responding to colonized religion in Amerika; Between | Space offers a relatively safer community space for those seeking something beyond a colonized Christianity or religion. Spaces designed with the modern-day *Copernican* in mind, those journeying towards healing religious trauma, while strengthening their ability to create as well as maintain a relatively healthy relationship with an inner-God as well as a meta-spiritual community in the 21st century. There is a plethora of traumas that exist in each human, theopoetically we refer to this inner psycho-spiritual space as *inner-terrestrial* because its relatively unexplored, unknown and creates

[51] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces: A Brilliant Examination, through Ancient Hero Myths, of Man's Eternal Struggle for Identity* (Nueva York: Fontana Press, 1949), 49-243.

fear; similar to how the average human in the U.S. is afraid of aliens or extraterrestrial.[52] Humans are often afraid of what they don't understand, to include their Self. So, allow us to explain theopoetically who we are, where we came from and why we are advocating for the healing of religiously traumatized millennials existing beyond a colonized Christianity.

Figure 8: The Heroes Journey




[52] Gordon Fraser, "Perspective | U.S. Worries about Space Aliens and UFOs Are Older than You Think," Washington Post, June 25, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/06/25/us-worries-about-space-aliens-ufos-are-older-than-you-think/ (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

Don Jose Ruiz, a Toltec Shaman from Southern Central Mexico, defines a Shaman as a *nagual,"* meaning the awakened ones"[53], in Nahuatl language. Nagual, or Shaman symbolizes "the life force energy, the divinity that we all have inside of us-the Shamans are the ones whose eyes are open to this realization."[54] A Shaman can be anyone who has experienced an *inner awakening* causing their *third eye/chakra* (spiritual eye) to open and see their relationship with Creation[i] in a different way: realizing that the original *Source*/God is in *Us* (God within). As a Shaman in journey, we have come to believe that "I" (Individual) cannot bring change to the world, but "we" (Collectively/Together) can bring change to the world. We believe that a Shaman's journey must continuously consider the effects of mutual immanence[55] between Self and God (everything): the religious relationship housed within us. Theopoetically, we imagine God being this vast Ocean of energy that sustains as well as creates life everywhere; we find ourselves swimming (deeply connected to all things) in and with an *Ocean of God*. Realizing that we are all interconnected regardless of our differences, my concern for my own religious trauma inspired me to consider how others are affected by religious trauma and walk with them. God provided the breeze and soon the flames of

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[53] Jose Ruiz, *Wisdom of the Shamans: What the Ancient Masters Can Teach Us about Love and Life* (San Antonio, TX: Hierophant Publishing, 2019), XII.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Andrew M. Davis, *Mind, Value, and Cosmos: On the Relational Nature of Ultimacy* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2021), 199. God, and the world also remain mutually transcendent such that any world happening owes it to its existence its own actualization as its own decision of unification of its relationality.

passion set ablaze, to explore the many ways we can be present in the 21st Century to reimagine community, myths and language for millennials experiencing religious trauma.

Feminist anthropologist and archaeologist, Alice Beck Kehoe describes Shamans as a necessary healing symbol[56] centered in *community healing* when she says, "healing thus is of more than individual benefit, because an incapacitated person requires sustenance and time from others. We gregarious mammals do not easily abandon members of our group; instead, we seek means to restore them to normal capacity."[57] As a Shaman who has separated from colonized Christianity and it's religious community due to my own religious traumas; we wish to form a space of community for those theopoetically wandering aimlessly in the dark wilderness looking for *milk and honey*. We feel compelled to co-create new spaces of opportunity for religiously traumatized millennials like us who seek to start understanding as well as healing their religious trauma and develop a relationship with God beyond colonized faith's and practices: no more *middle men*.

Like us, religiously traumatized millennials in our setting have decided to stop practicing organized religion, particularly colonized versions of Christianity in Amerika to seek relative answers that point us to the great indescribable phenomenon: God. It's

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[56] David Ray Griffin, 78. [Jung's definition of symbol] A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible expression of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented, is symbolic… So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way.

[57] Alice Beck Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion: An Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000), 27.

important that we experience God for our Self and not be told what God is by colonized religion's. Our setting affirms that we are not alone in experiencing religious trauma and migrating from a religious way of life like a colonized Christianity. We wish to understand this demographic that is experiencing religious trauma and exile in Amerika, so that theopoetic language can be co-created to bridge past to present; so that the possibilities of future are relatively healthier. It's in our religiously absolute past that we begin to understand why we are presently experiencing several religious traumas. How and why has God called us to journey outside the four walls of colonized religion?

**A Journey of Identity**

We haven't always identified as *a Shaman in journey*: who we are today is a result of a cosmically unique collaboration of experiences and a painful process of letting go. We started this journey in the streets of Brooklyn as a poor Pisces boy who over time developed into a spiritually traumatized Queer[58] Black[59] Pisces who remains trapped within an urban capitalistic dilemma: Amerika. When we were born, the doctor on shift told the nurses to keep me separated from my *mother*; my *mother* sniffed cocaine repeatedly while she was pregnant with me and some of it entered into my bloodstream. We were birthed into an ecstasy experience that would allow us the opportunity to encounter liminal space during an infancy period. In an incubator is where we were

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[58] Isherwood, Lisa, and Marcella Althaus-Reid. *Trans/Formations*. London: SCM Press, 2009. 17. [Queer] Whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.

[59] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Philadelphia (PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 12. an experience that has a person exist in a system of racism, a life of humiliation and suffering. Blackness symbolizes oppression and liberation in any society.

physically, but our collective essence was with Source, undergoing a process of Self-cultivation. We were what hospitals label "a premature baby." My *mother* underwent a Cesarean delivery (C-section) so that we may have a fighting chance to experience life. She voluntarily had the surgical staff cut through her abdomen to make a way for me to come into this World. Within seconds we were violently pulled from the Source and tossed into an extremely hostile urban environment. We were born into an absolute system: labeled and tagged with a nine-digit identification number. Within my first few breaths as a newborn baby, we were given a name, gender, pre-approved limited access and a life expectancy. We were thrown into a theopoetically *old smelly box*: a system of control, built by slaves for slaves. We're referring to the Amerikan dream: a system of slavery and exploitation (colonization).

We were expected to stay within a religiously *old smelly box* and perish with the hope of going to a place Christianity refers to as heaven. As a young child, we were expected to be seen and not heard. However, it felt more like we were unseen by our Mother, the Church and Country. As a child, we became accustomed to not being seen or acknowledged in public and in the Church. We were homeless most times, living on the streets, doing odd jobs or favors for an *odd few dollars*. We lived a nomadic life, living in shelters throughout our childhood and having no place to call home. Our traumatic life caused us to portray a theopoetic *hurt child* archetype: living in our head most times,

daydreaming of a better life experience.[60] Along with being an introvert, we found safety in our solitude: our imagination had no limits. It's in our solitude that we theopoetically imagined symbols of advocacy but never associated the Church with the poetic image of advocacy.

Our nomadic lifestyle granted us the miracle of experiencing a television during a time when we were receiving public housing: we had a two-bedroom apartment with cold lifeless walls. During this time, we only watched public cable: whatever could be watched with a bent metal hanger to receive a clear picture. At times we would stand behind the television holding the hanger antenna with one hand in a very odd but strenuous position to get a clear picture so that our *mother* could watch her favorite show. Television was God in a box, where we could get lost in watching the many hypnotizing moving images. Television made me feel safe, it was a box of possibilities and wonder. The moving symbols spoke to who we are and our passions; shows on PBS (Public Broadcasting Station) like, Sesame Street, Puzzle Place, Reading Rainbow, Barney and Mr. Rogers Neighborhood would take our mind to indescribable places: relatively sacred spaces.

We honestly learned more about Self in relationship to the world from television; our mother, school or the colonized Church failed to prepare us the way television

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[60] Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 101. Because traumatized people often have trouble sensing what is going on in their bodies, they lack a nuanced response to frustration. They either react to stress by becoming *spaced out* or with excessive anger.

programs did. We learned how to count and contextualize from programs like Sesame Street. We learned how to socialize and express feelings from programs like Barney and Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. We had the deepest dialogs with Mr. Rogers on things that affected our spirit as well as our body. We daydreamed of symbols in motion and would pretend to embody these incredible advocating symbols. My mother didn't have much to give or offer but she was able to gift me a theological inheritance: a theopoetic marriage between Christianity and colonization that is a *fascist authority* subconsciously enforcing and perpetuating a colonized religious criterion for humans on Earth.

To be a colonized Christian is to be pure, decent, obedient and law abiding based on the authoritatively colonized interpretations of sacred text in a poor urban context (the Ghetto), we are expected to have faith in an absolute God with human fatherly traits and follow the king of kings because it is believed to be *the way* in a patriarchal system of exploitation. My mother: an ambassador of a colonized Christianity colonized me in the faith to be decent and obedient to the laws of God that are synonymous with the laws of the land. We identified as Christian because our mother believed she was Christian. Our poor life and hardship were ignored and disregarded when we were told to "have faith." Our mother believed that by being Christian, we were chosen people and God would protect us from evil. We now associate being a colonized Christian with the theopoetic imagery and feeling of being dead: lifeless and enslaved. It deeply hurts us that we could not express our Self or breathe in a colonized Christian community; a publicly and socially designated sacred space -none the less, we feel the gravitational pull of God to journey with religiously traumatized millennials who find themselves traversing

relatively dark confusing paths with trauma wounds caused by toxic immature discipleship practiced in colonized Christian spaces like the Amerikan Church. We are being called to free-fall into the *Abyss* of Self and to use our wounds and traumas to help others in their journey to discovering Self in Amerika.

**Religious Trauma Syndrome**

The symbolic parents of religiously traumatized millennials, whether a colonized Church or colonized humans; collectively we all played a significant part in the experiencing of religious trauma. So much that religious trauma has now influenced many religiously traumatized millennials to choose a different path and leave what they knew most of their life: a colonized Christianity in Amerika. "Religious trauma syndrome (RTS) occurs when an individual struggles with leaving a religion or a set of beliefs that has led to their indoctrination. It often involves the trauma of breaking away from a controlling environment, lifestyle, or [religion]. In some settings the symptoms of religious trauma can be similar to that of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD)."[61]

> Religious Trauma Syndrome is not an actual diagnosis and is not included in the most recent version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5). However, this does not mean that it is non-existent or doesn't impact millions of individuals every year. Religion can easily be weaponized, and sayings can be twisted to fit the agenda of the messenger. Shame, guilt, and

[61] Alisha Powell, PhD, LCSW and Benjamin Troy, MD, "Religious Trauma Syndrome: Examples, Symptoms, & 7 Ways to Cope," Choosing Therapy (Choosing Therapy, 2021), www.choosingtherapy.com/religious-trauma-syndrome/ (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

> condemnation can be among many of the harmful messages communicated which can lead to lasting and deep mental health wounds and damage to the psyche.[62]

The many within our setting who "leave religion in Ameri[k]a become isolated from their former [colonized faith] communities, which can make them anxious, depressed, or even suicidal. -No deconversion story is the same, but many who leave behind strongly held religious beliefs can see an impact on their health."[63] Our concern for the millennials in our setting who have unresolved religious trauma and have migrated from a colonized Christianity (religion) is inspired by a psychologist who specializes in religious recovery, Marlene Winell, Ph.D. She defined "the term *religious trauma* as pervasive psychological damage resulting from religious messages, beliefs, and experiences."[64] We believe that those in our setting who have migrated from a colonized religion or way of life such as colonized Christianity, they are experiencing something equivalent to post traumatic stress disorder. Christian Pastor, Michael Walrond Jr., said: "some Churches weaponize scripture and religion to do very deep damage on the psyche."[65]

> We think of Church as a place of healing and transformation, and it is, says Michael Walrond Jr., pastor of the First Corinthian Baptist Church in Harlem. But for some, he says, "religion has been

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[62] Richard Schiffman, "When Religion Leads to Trauma," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/well/mind/religion-trauma-lgbt-gay-depression-anxiety.html (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

[63] Jon Fortenbury, "The Health Effects of Leaving Religion," The Atlantic, September 28, 2014, www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/09/the-health-effects-of-leaving-religion/379651/ (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

[64] Alyson M. Stone, "Thou Shalt Not: Treating Religious Trauma and Spiritual Harm with Combined Therapy," *Group* 37, no. 4 (2013): 323, doi.org/10.13186/group.37.4.0323 (accessed Feb 23, 2022).

[65] Richard Schiffman.

> more bruising and damaging than healing and transformative. Pastor Mike, as he is called, leads services in a renovated art deco movie palace on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. Under his direction, the church has taken a lead in confronting an issue that few other religious institutions have tackled: what some call religious trauma syndrome.[66]

Religious trauma doesn't just affect religiously traumatized millennials after they migrate from a colonized Christianity, its constantly present since its conception of abuse and violence. Religious trauma quietly exists underneath the surface of our persona, where the world and public cannot see. Those in our setting often will suppress or sacrifice what they feel and have experienced to serve or uphold a community symbol like the colonized Church or colonized interpretation of Christ (see Figure 9). The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are seeking to experience individuation: a relative journey inward towards Self, a process of healing through Self myth making. A colonized Church is not the space for individuation to be a process due to its fascistly communal focus on making many into one pure absolute image of God: which is experienced by religiously traumatized millennials as colonization (see Figure 9). This has religiously traumatic effects in us that create a plethora of inner psycho-spiritual dimensions, each representing an unresolved and unaware trauma (see Figure 10). We believe that when a human leaves a colonized religion like Christianity, theopoetically, they experience a relative *snap*. For example, if the psyche was a twig and experienced pressure from polar ends, the pressure would cause a *snapping* of the twig (psyche) in

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[66] Ibid.

two. The *snapping* of their psyche (trauma) creates a "flight or fight"[67] response. This instinctive human response is partly why so many religiously traumatized millennials in our setting have migrated out of a colonized Christianity in Amerika.

> When the collective psyche [Church] is in a stable state, the vast majority of individuals share a common living myth or deity [Religion]. Each individual projects [their] inner God-image (the Self) to the religion of the community. The collective religion [like Christianity] then serves as the container of the Self for a multitude of individuals. The reality of the transpersonal life-forces is mirrored in the external imagery that the church embodies in its symbolism, mythology, rites and dogma. As long as it is functioning adequately, the church protects the society against any widespread inflation or alienation. Such a stable state of affairs is represented diagrammatically [(See Figure 9)]. Although this situation is stable it has its defects. The Self or God-image is still unconscious, i.e., not recognized as an inner, psychic entity. Although the community of believers will be in relative harmony with one another because of their shared projection, the harmony is illusory and to some extent spurious. In relation to the church the individuals will be in a state of collective identification or participation mystique and will not have made any unique, individual relation to the Self. If now the outer church loses its capacity to carry the projection of the Self, we have the condition which Nietzsche announced for the modern world, "God is dead!"[68] [See Figure 10]

The religiously traumatized millennials in our setting are a group of humans that have become relatively more aware of what is religiously and traumatically affecting them in an intersectional way. They realize that they are more than what colonized Christianity and its colonized interpretations of the Bible has said they are and seek to find meaning through and in their own spiritual experiences. [Religiously Traumatized Millennials] Where God could be found for their parents and grandparents; God isn't there for them, God is relatively beyond the colonized synthetically sacred space of purity designated by imperialistic colonizers.

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[67] An automatic physiological reaction to an event that is perceived as stressful or frightening.
[68] Edward F Edinger, 65.

Figure 9: The Stable State of a community of religious believers.

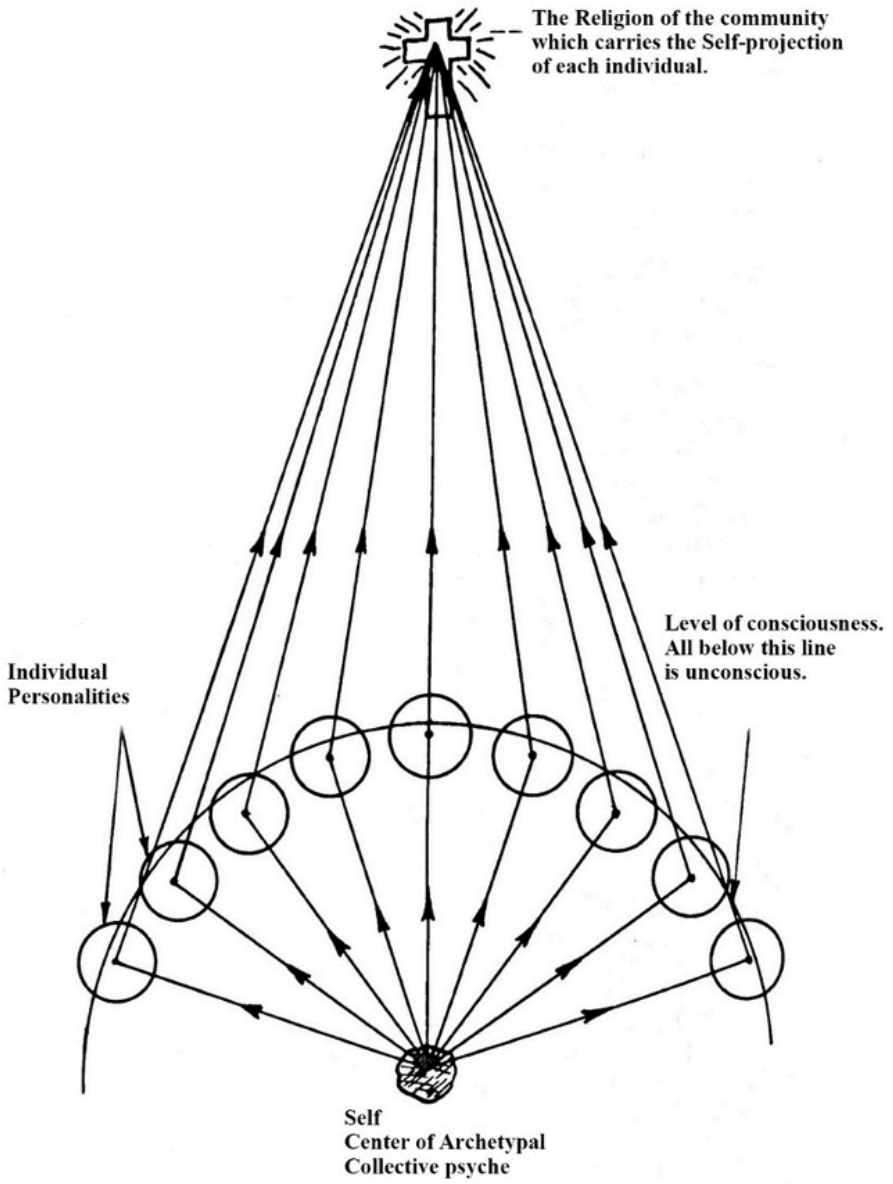
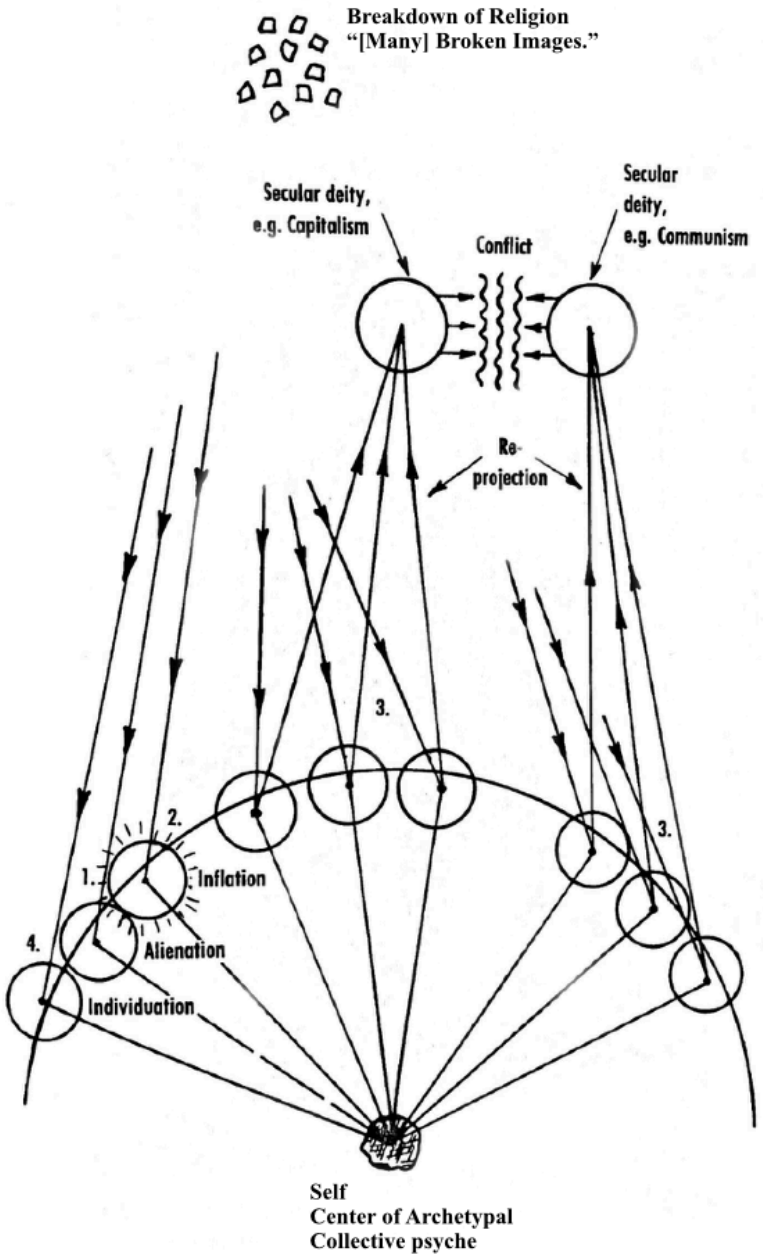


Figure 10: Breakdown of a religious projection.



**Our Religious Trauma**

My mother birthed me into a reality relevant to the displaced, disenfranchised and dehumanized poor. Surviving and navigating the Christian *Amerikan* way of life. Like many children in New York Cities *Ghetto-poor* culture during the 21st century, we were mentored and nourished by a struggling woman of color in *Amerika*: theopoetically an image of *Sophia*[69] in the flesh. My mother was the primal relationship,[70] a *feminine* symbol encompassing the building blocks for existence, a *mother archetype*: a genderless interpersonal relationship[71] that provides nourishment, warmth, protection and tenderness in all areas of life.[72] Religiously a colonized Church is a colonized mother symbol: a home for the early stages of development in faith, it's the *interpersonal space* created by a mother symbol (a colonized Church) and their faith practitioners (colonized Children). However, when a human separates from their theopoetic mother symbol like a colonized Church; what was hidden underneath the surface of our persona, now becomes exposed

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[69] Henry Corbin, *Jung, Buddhism, and the Incarnation of Sophia: Unpublished Writings from the Philosopher of the Soul* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2019), 117. The idea of Sophia or divine wisdom (*Sapientia Dei),* a Spirit *(Pneuma)* of a feminine nature-we would say a coeternal hypostasis existing before Creation.

[70] Erich Neumann, *The Fear of the Feminine and Other Essays on Feminine Psychology* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 4. Initially the unconscious appears as the good mother-that is, the child's primal relationship to her carries a positive accent, for the dependent, infantile ego is protected and nourished by the maternal unconscious.

[71] Ibid, 231. This means that the mother of the primal relationship, as the one who encompasses, contains, and directs life, is at the same time both *world*, and *Self* in one. -an archetypal, transpersonal position-no matter how the infant may experience her [Mother archetype] physically, she is objectively the surrounding world in which and from which it lives.

[72] Ibid, 230. The phenomenon of the primal relationship to the mother during the first year of life consists basically in this: even following its birth, the child lives in the mother as "something contained" and is totally dependent on the "positive elementary character" of the mother [The Great Mother archetype] as the one who provides nourishment, warmth, protection, and tenderness in all areas of its life.

and felt: an unraveling of religious trauma.

My colonized *mother* attempted to be a good, colonized Christian and would recite Bible scriptures that empowered a fascist authority ordained by a colonized interpretation of God. Our *mother* loved to quote scripture by saying things like, "children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty the Lord." (Colossians 3:20-21 NRSV) So, when we didn't "obey" our *mother,* we were taught to understand that we were disobeying God. Many colonized Churches in Amerika have done a similar symbol association, instilling in the practitioners through revised doctrine, an absolute contradiction: to disobey the Church is to disobey God. Colonized Christianity has also created a criteria that is used by the world without question, a criteria that is religiously traumatizing and dehumanizing. This has brought unmeasurable religious trauma to our life because of how symbols like Jesus have been used. We recall at the age of seven years old, kneeling on rice in the nude while reading about Jesus: our Lord and Savior. A commonly crude punishment our *mother* enforced when she felt that we disobeyed her or God. The countless beatings and punishments given by my *mother* daily were attempts to live a good colonized Christian life and instill good colonized Christian obedient values; religious trauma imbedded it's essence in the deepest layer of our Spirit and Flesh that cannot be ignored or forgotten.

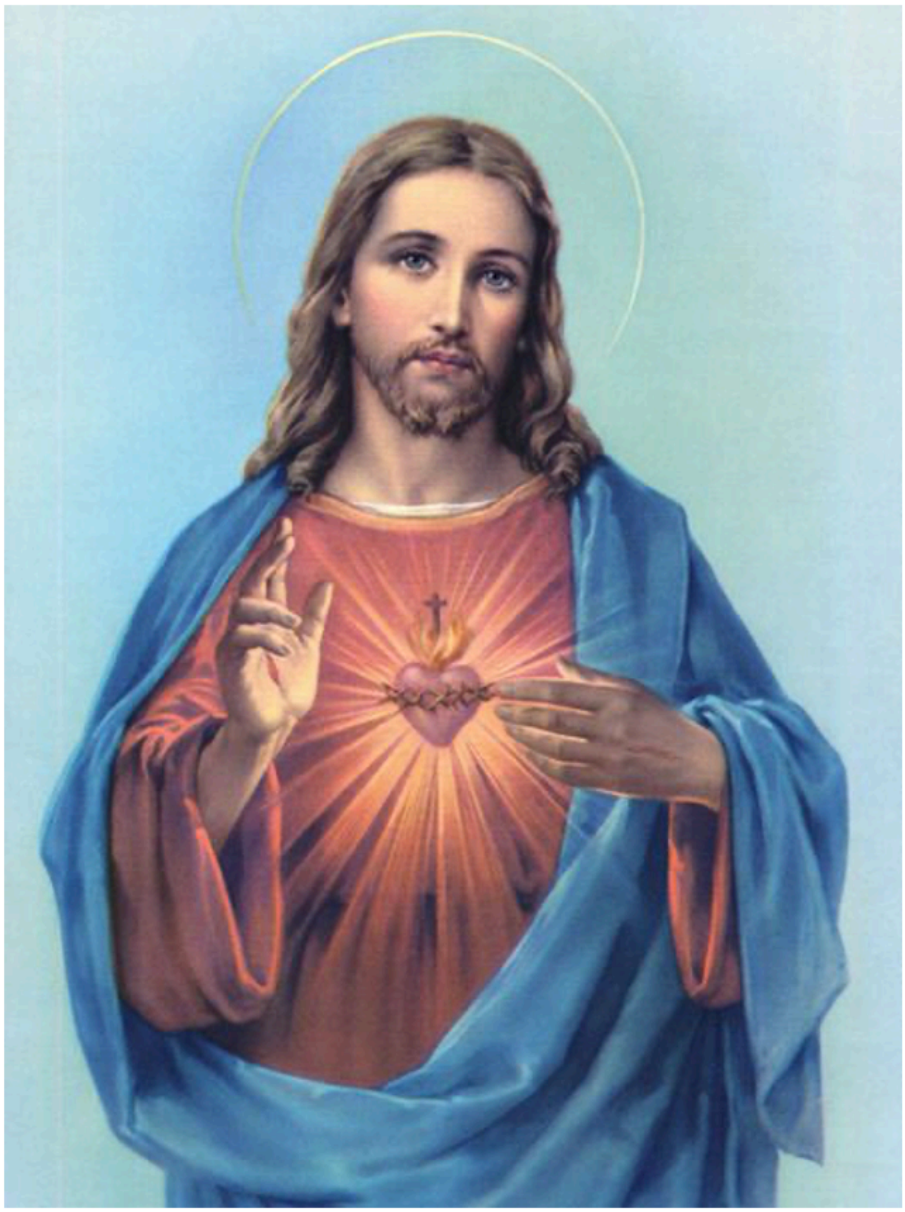
**Inner-Terrestrial Trauma**

We carry invisible scars as well as physical scars that act as reminders of what the colonized Church has done to us indirectly through our colonized *mother*. [Trauma] Jesus was a symbol found in most homes we went to, hanging above the entry door or in a

frame hanging on the family wall. The only humans we saw who looked like Jesus based on the images in colonized Church (see Figure 11 & 12), were our teachers, police officers and the people who managed the shelters: they were always in positions of power dictating what is decent or indecent. In our mind, Jesus was pale skinned with bright blue eyes and blondish golden hair who could be seen hanging around in Churches or in someone's home watching them from the wall or above the door. We grew up considering Jesus as the *Boogieman*: the one who is always watching and waiting for you to be queerly indecent or untameably disobedient.

Figure 11: Portrait of Jesus Christ Painting by Dragan Cvetkovic Cvele.

Figure 12: The Sacred Heart of Jesus



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A relationship of anxiety in our mind that correlated Jesus with a dark scary entity that is after us and if it gets us, we die. Jesus wasn't a symbol of liberation we wanted to embody, instead, Jesus was an oppressive symbol we hid from in shame like Adam hiding in shame from God (Genesis 3:8) because we knew we could never live up to the unrealistic symbolic value of a perfect Jesus: the begotten Son of God. Jesus symbolized a perfectly powerful slave master ordained by an absolutely colonized God; a sanctioned kidnapping and enslavement of humans justified by a colonized Christian doctrine. So, instead we yearned to be a symbol that felt like a well-oiled and broken in baseball glove: an extension of Self. As we strive to be in relationship with Self, we began developing questions that repeatedly evoked an absolute response from the colonized Church: "have faith." However, faith didn't explain the indescribable things happening inside us, we required an understanding of Self: a relational God. So, we started a journey of individuation to discover inner truth: Self. We began backpacking the shadow trails of our mind, mapping indescribable spaces and re-creating relationships with shadow symbols imprisoned by religious trauma.

As humans, we often are afraid of what we do not understand, we rarely establish relationships with dark things that are considered indecent, scary or sin. Instead, we are programmed by colonized religious doctrine to not feel safe outside the colonized Church. Perhaps fear is inevitably the lack of information that haunts us as humans. The late theologian and author, Howard Thurman contributes; "fear is one of the persistent hounds of hell that dog the footsteps of the poor, the dispossessed, the disinherited." We

believe Thurman is articulating how fear is a constant part of our reality because it's the polar to knowing. A theopoetic embodiment of religious trauma in the 21st Century.

We are conditioned to believe that we are safe in God's house, yet it's ironic how pain and suffering has made its way inside. The body of Christ (Creation) has been exposed too colonized interpretations of the gospels (good news) and Yeshua (the Jewish colored man murdered by an empire). This theopoetic human poison has killed many and continues to religiously traumatize more. In relation to colonized Christianity, we are naturally indecent and queer because we don't realize that we have been stolen and put into an *old smelly box*: a synthetic environment that produces artificial meaning to maintain control over others. Due to Christianity being in relationship with colonization; it mimics what the other is doing until synergy is created. It's the synergy between Christianity and colonization that creates a religiously traumatizing space for human faith practitioner's. Sometimes this space can even feel hopeless: an absence of God. However, even within the religiously *old smelly box* of colonized Christianity, God comes to a starving dreamer by means of a theophany:[73] relevant, restorative and revolutionary dreams that reimagine old symbols to give new meanings with the intention of liberation. As a Shaman journeying with religiously traumatized humans, "[We] exist within an Amerikan dream: [a colonized] Christian nation in which [were theopoetically] segregated, lynched and burned."[74] We're experiencing a nightmare that we cannot easily

[73] When a dreamer experiences God or a form of God in their dream.
[74] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 4.

wake from, but no less a *Dream*: a plain of existence beyond and between time and space: where God can be perceived in a relatively unimaginable way.

Finally, religiously traumatized millennials theopoetically symbolize a "cultural longing for love."[75] "Mother Teresa observes, the greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved and uncared for."[76] Theopoetically, colonized Christianity has incubated a religious parasite that feeds on the unwanted, unloved and uncared for. As someone who was birthed out of the disenfranchised, dislocated and dehumanized poor: we are molded by our experiences with a colonized Christianity in Amerika. We unrealistically expected the Church: God's body of people, to love and care for us. To be abused, raped, starved and lied to by a theopoetic mother symbol like a colonized Church, has irreversibly affected us physically, psychologically and spiritually. We wish to love and care for Self, so that we may be whole enough to help others do the same beyond a colonized Christianity. By creating Between | Space's, we aim to begin healing religious trauma for other's and our Self.

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[75] John Seel, Jr., 173.
[76] Ibid.

## Chapter III: Research Questions

### Introduction

At the center of our religious trauma project are three research questions that act as foundational pillars of thought for our action-based project. These three questions can be interpreted as God's unrelenting pull towards something hidden or unknown. A theopoetic invitation to explore the inner abyss of humanities potential for healing and community.

### Research Question #1

If a colonized Church is community, how has a colonized Church been modeled and who is this colonized community modeled for? What does multi-faith community look like when tailored to millennials experiencing religious trauma in the 21st century?

### Research Question #2

How can Theopoetics be used as a method of film interpretation that can help religiously traumatized millennials develop personal myths that introduces as well as stimulates healing and Self-development?

### Research Question #3

How does the Paulo Freire model of intentional dialogue and active listening create a relatively therapeutic space for religiously traumatized millennials?

## Chapter IV: Plan of Implementation

**Goal 1:** Co-create (with Site-team) a multi-faith state of consciousness (online Community) for religiously traumatized millennials who have separated from a colonized Christianity. Public | Space (see Figure 13) is a theopoetic[77] and meta-spiritual[78] community created for those seeking depthiness of Self. A meta-space of relationship influenced by individuation (the process of understanding Self) and love.

Figure 13: Public | Space

- ***Strategy 1*:** Create an online community for millennials struggling with religious trauma using a digital community platform called "Mighty Networks;" to join, learn, continue healing and gather.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Focus on inviting religiously traumatized millennials to join, create, speak and be heard in Public|Space.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Prepare public messages, expressions and advertisements that poetically promote the initiation of individuation as well as God beyond the colonized Church (multi-faith messages).
- ***Strategy 4*:** Create a podcast series that expresses and shares the community's ideas and journey towards Self (individuation). Posting & hosting once a month for eight months.

**Evaluation of Goal 1:** Community members and guest will be asked to complete a monthly questionnaire that allows them to offer feedback, critique, or suggestions. The

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[77] Theo-Poetics is a poetically theological and spiritual method of understanding a multi-faith God in everyday living or in time; a relatively sacred language combining pieces of poetic analysis, theology, mythology, spirituality and meta-modernity.

[78] ] The Journeying of an unfollowable path, a relatively authentic connection with an inner Source (God) and the exploration of Self in community with others Journeying towards Self. Humans embody an ever expanding and inclusive relationship between Self and an eternally unchanging Source of Vibration (God).

community must grow based on its occupants, therefore monitoring the growth of members will provide information that can be measured and evaluated.

**Goal 2:** Co-create a series of theopoetic film study courses that use Jungian Analysis and Theopoetics to identify, analyze and understand archetypical as well as theopoetic symbols in film. Between | Film (see Figure 14) will be a series of online courses that use a dialogical approach in a digital space to identify and express moving theopoetic and archetypical symbols/images in film.

Figure 14: Between | Film

- ***Strategy 1*:** Take an online course with the Centre of Applied Jungian Studies focused on Jungian Analytical principles being applied to Film. The course is called "Jungian Film School." We hypothesis that this course will strengthen our ideas and the many archetypes found in film.
- ***Strategy 2*:** Use the "Mighty Networks" platform to host courses/lectures.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Organize & study a series of films.
- ***Strategy 4*:** Develop syllabuses for the following dialogue categories: a Shadow, a Community, and a Heroes Journey.
- ***Strategy 5*:** Incorporate Theopoetics as a method of interpreting film.

**Evaluation of Goal 2:** Students will be asked to complete a pre and post course questionnaire that allows them to observe and compare what they knew before the course to what they learned after the course. The post questionnaire will also offer the space of

opportunity for students to share feedback, opinions, critique or suggestions on how the course can be improved.

**Goal 3:** Co-create a Shaman facilitated listening space that offers opportunity for religious trauma to begin healing (individuation). Safe | Space (see Figure 15) is a meta-spiritual listening space focused on listening and empathizing with religiously traumatized millennials.

Figure 15: Safe | Space

- ***Strategy 1*:** Apply listening skills developed and learned from completing two units (800+ hours) of CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education)
- ***Strategy 2*:** Implement "Shamanic Journeying" through dialogue, particularly Paulo Freire's method of increasing humanity through a critical pedagogy dialogue while active listening.
- ***Strategy 3*:** Hosting one on one or group listening spaces online or in person. This space is facilitated by a Shaman in journey and is focused on listening to millennials who have experienced religious trauma and how it continues to affect them.
- ***Strategy 4*:** Purchase an annual subscription to Zoom.
- ***Strategy 5*:** Incorporate Theopoetic language.
- ***Strategy 6*:** Integrate into the "Mighty Networks" platform. Public|Space should allow access to Safe|Space.

**Evaluation of Goal 3**: Participants will be asked to complete a pre-session questionnaire that allows them to offer feedback, critique or suggestions. Participants will also be asked to complete a pre-check-in questionnaire that allows them to share their feelings, colors, symbols and a memory as it correlates to the religious trauma being shared in the listening circle.

## Chapter V: Ministerial Competences

Our site team consists of three transformational leaders who are religiously traumatized millennials that have separated from a colonized form Christianity. They practice seeking God beyond the colonized Christian Church (colonized religion) and have been for the last decade. The members in the site team all walk unique individual paths but this project creates a sense of community among each other that reflects multi-faith, vulnerability, transformation and a relative acceptance of Self. Grizelle Medina-Díaz collaborated with us to share her Taíno art & culture, art therapy expertise and colonized Christian trauma. Yesenia Fernández collaborated with us to share her spirituality, colonized Christian trauma and wounded mother experience. Steven M. Díaz collaborated with us to share his post Christian perspective, colonized Christian trauma and Theophany experiences. We believe those who make up this site team are equipped with enough life experience, religious trauma and knowledge to determine if we are lacking in any of the following competencies as well as offer transformational feedback to evolve as a multi-faith leader. We met in person over dinner at my house in New Britain, CT on January 1st, 2022 and reviewed all 14 multi-faith competencies. The following competencies allowed us to re-imagine Aaron Waldron as a living symbol in a process of religious trauma during the 21st Century.

**NYTS Multi-faith Ministerial Competency Assessment Instrument**

Below you will find a list of qualifying words used to qualify the multi-faith ministerial competencies in each of the several areas that are outlined in the following pages. The Site Team as a whole, in dialogue with a multi-faith minister, is to engage in an assessment of each competency that ends with assigning a qualifying word to each. Where possible, specific examples should be given to illustrate the response. The multi-faith minister should be a full participant in this competency assessment.

**Key to the Meaning of Qualifying Words**

**"Continue"**

This is a competency that this person already excels or rates as highly satisfactory in performance.

**"Develop"**

This is a competency that this person shows strength in but needs to hone and smooth in order to develop further or excel.

**"Attention"**

This points to an area where special attention is needed, especially in light of a particular ministry in which the person is engaged. It may be that the person was never provided an opportunity to develop competency, but it could also be that a personal characteristic

(mood, temperament, commitment, or problem) interferes with the development and execution of the competency.

**"Start"**

This designates a competency for which a gift has been uncovered but is not being used and is an area to develop because the talent is latent.

**"Skip"**

This is a competency that this person for some reason should leave alone. Be sure to indicate why she or he should leave it alone.

**"No Basis"**

If there is no basis for assessment for this candidate, say so.

---

**Assessment of Multi-Faith Candidate Competency**

1. **Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition**

A multi-faith minister must be knowledgeable about his or her own faith tradition, capable of interpreting it accurately in a wider multi-faith context, and able to encourage others within the tradition to grow in faith and understanding.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively knowledgeable on their faith tradition, is capable of interpreting through a multi-faith lens and is naturally someone who encourages others to be their best Self. **(CONTINUE)**

2. **Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions**

A multi-faith minister must also be knowledgeable and show appreciation for faith traditions that are not his or her own. She or he must be capable of demonstrating how an appreciation of the other in particular is grounded in one's own faith tradition, capable of hearing and responding to the value of faith traditions of others, and able to encourage others to grow within a wider multi-faith context.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively knowledgeable on their faith tradition as well as many commonly indigenously practiced faiths. The site team felt that Aaron was a great example of a multi-faith leader. **(CONTINUE)**

3. **Ability to engage productively in dialogue**

Ministry in a multifaith context necessarily requires an ability to engage in dialogue with other faith traditions, and with those who hold different faith commitments. Dialogue requires openness to the other and ability to respond honestly in a way that creates a sense of community that transcends the differences. Dialogue does not necessarily have as its objective removal or erasure of boundaries between traditions, but it does entail border crossing. The goal of dialogue is not necessarily agreement, but greater understanding on the side of all involved.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is a seasoned public speaker and that dialogue is where they are already comfortable as well as experienced. **(CONTINUE)**

**4. Ability to interpret sacred texts**

Using appropriate language, with sensitivity to the texts and identities of others, and demonstrating effectiveness in communicating one's ideas, an interpreter of sacred texts presents researched, organized, well-prepared, sermons or other similar forms of proclamation that are relevant and challenging to the listener's life and spiritual development.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron integrates multi-faith language that considers most and constantly switches synonymously through different faiths and interpretations of religious, spiritual and psychological text/information. **(CONTINUE)**

**5. Ability as worship leader**

While worship is rarely, if ever, multifaith in character, it is often conducted in a multifaith context. A worship leader who is sensitive to multifaith realities is responsible for conducting structured or formal aspects of worship – its sacraments or ordinances, its variety of rites, its arts of worship – with sensitivity to differences. The leader presents the sacraments or ordinances as a living sign of the presence of the holy, with meaningful confession, prayer and praise as appropriate. But he or she cannot assume that these symbols are directed only toward the members of one's own faith community. He or she must be able to plan and lead worship services that reflect an awareness and active engagement with other's traditions and commitments of the diverse faith communities.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively great at hosting multi-faith and multi-dimensional spaces. Worshiping looks and feels different but Aaron is great at making humans feel included. Their divine ability to be hospitable is the essence of their ability to lead worship rituals and other humans through sacred spaces. **(CONTINUE)**

**6. Facilitating transformation**

Prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptural tradition is more than a matter of ecstatic speech uttered through the power of the Spirit (although it is this), and much more than merely telling the future (although it certainly has a strong eschatological dimension). A prophet is one who does not "foretell" so much as "forth-tell" the truth, doing so in such a way as to communicate the divine or transcendent passion for love and justice. As a prophet, a multifaith minister speaks the truth in love, communicates an awareness of social injustices, and sensitizes others to spiritual and ethical implications of various structures and practices in the church/synagogue/mosque/religious community, and in the wider society.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron should take the opportunity to explore more in depth the process of facilitating transformation. The concept is puzzling and we believe that there is opportunity to further investigate for further personal development. **(DEVELOP)**

**7. Ability as multifaith leader**

A leader is one who creates an environment in which a variety of gifts may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative when appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the sensitivity to share resources.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively knowledgeable on their faith tradition as well as many other practiced faiths. The site team felt that Aaron was a great example of a metamodern multi-faith leader. **(CONTINUE)**

**8. Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator**

A religious educator challenges the hearer to discover new resources within her or himself and others. He or she invites others to a new and more spiritually enlightened consciousness about self and society. With creativity and courage, he or she prompts us to ask new questions and work toward healing, reconciliation and justice. Such a challenge elicits personal growth in the gifts of the Spirit, which in turn overflow into the life of the community.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively knowledgeable multi-faith religious educator. They will naturally learn more through this project, but this competency isn't a priority at this moment in their journey. **(CONTINUE)**

**9. Ability as counselor in a multifaith context**

Counseling is concerned with the work of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. In performing these tasks, the counselor has the privilege of walking with others on their inner journey toward wholeness. The effectiveness of any form of counseling is always contingent on the pastor, rabbi or other religious leader. Whatever model or theory one chooses to guide one's practice, it is imperative that the counselor be capable of establishing creative relationships that can help others become more whole. To the degree that the counselor is open, genuine, free, self-accepting and growing, she or he will foster these qualities in others.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively capable multi-faith counselor. We believe its Aarons ability to see humans beyond their fleshly bodies; they don't see race the way most Amerikans do. Their perspective is very inclusive and healing. **(CONTINUE)**

**10. Spiritual Leader**

Ministers are spiritual leaders of a community. As such, they are expected to be able to communicate effectively to others spiritual awareness and power. To do so, however, they must first be themselves grounded in spiritual disciplines and regularly exercising personal spiritual practices.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron should take the opportunity to explore more in depth the idea of being a "spiritual leader." We decided this because Aaron is still developing and we couldn't consciously say that this competency isn't a priority. **(DEVELOP)**

**11. Witness**

Various religious traditions understand the role of ministry beyond the borders of their community differently, but one of the common ways this is understood is through the symbol or practice of bearing witness. In bearing witness in both word and deed, a minister often extends the fundamental message of faith beyond the immediate boundaries of his or her own immediate religious community. Such activities need to be judged as to whether they are good news not just by those who are the insiders of a particular faith tradition, but by those who are on the outside as well. When carried out effectively, the witness that is made is truly experienced as life-giving by all who give it and receive it.

| |
|---|
| The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively capable of being a "witness." We believe its Aaron's ability to see humans beyond human property; they believe in cultivating life forms. Their perspective obligates them to witness because they believe in "free will:" the freedom of choice given by the Creator of the Universe, God. They can only influence choices but can never force choice. This is the verb of witnessing practiced by Aaron. **(CONTINUE)** |

**12. Administrator**

Administration is virtually a universal religious practice. An administrator is able to define and analyze a task or problem succinctly and clearly, establish concrete and realistic goals, develop strategies which flow out of these goals and initiate a clear, on-

going process of evaluation. She or he communicates a sense of mission which sees each task as part of the whole life of the congregation and establishes a collegial environment in which the gifts of others are expressed. Through it all, there is precision, accuracy, organization and purpose. One senses that time is well spent, that efforts are not duplicated, and that efficiency is balanced against other competing factors.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively capable of fulfilling the "administrator" role. Due to Aaron's personality type being the "Advocate" (INFJ) and their astrology symbol reflecting a "Taurus rising;" they are naturally organized, structured, disciplined and are perceived by the world to be an administrator. **(CONTINUE)**

**13. Organizer**

A community organizer is more than someone who can create the grounds for social change. A community organizer is one who learns the community, and helps the community come to know itself. Organizing is a task that everyone in ministry must engage in some way. Multifaith community organizing entails a special ability to organize not within but across religious boundaries in ways that crosses them responsibly while empowering people to work together for change that will bring a greater measure of common good.

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is relatively capable of fulfilling the "organizer" role. Due to Aaron's personality type being the "Advocate" (INFJ), they are naturally organized, structured and are perceived to be natural leaders. **(CONTINUE)**

**14. Professional**

The professionalization of ministry is sometimes lamented but understood properly the minister as professional is one who realizes excellence in his or her calling. Among the skills that undergird the performance of ministry, those of the professional cannot be

The site team agreed that Aaron Waldron is a "professional" more times than not.

**(CONTINUE)**

**Competencies Chosen for Development**

*Competency Six:* **Facilitating Transformation**

Continue (1) **Develop (3)** Attention (0)

We chose this competency because transformation is not something we control but instead is something we come into relationship with. Out of all 14 competencies, this competency was the most challenging to vulnerably answer. Our efforts will be measured by the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of our "fruits of labor." How can we improve our own ability to host and journey with others through transformation?

**Strategies:**

(1) We will educate our Self on the relatively best practices and methods for developing intersectional courses that evoke individuation.

(2) We will listen to what others have to say with intense focus on what is and what is not being said. This can allow us to understand other and co create a femininely mother (safe) space that cultivates transformation.

(3) We will develop a curriculum for our proposed online courses that influence students to change how they think while considering their identity in relation to what they think.

**Evaluation:**

(1) At the beginning and end of each online course, students will complete a questionnaire that will offer a pool of quantitative data that will measure my proficiency as a facilitator of transformation.

*Competency Ten:* **Spiritual Leader**

Continue (1) **Develop (3)** Attention (0)

We chose this competency because being a "Spiritual Leader" isn't mastered but instead is a process we can improve. Out of all 14 competencies, this competency was the most spiritually vulnerable process in the project. Our efforts will be measured by our journey (our walk) and how we influence others. How can we improve our practice of spirituality to express things constantly changing in and around us?

**Strategies:**

(1) We will educate our-Self on the best practices and methods for developing a spiritual practice that evokes individuation, transformation and healing.

(2) We will practice and observe our spiritual practice daily by keeping an audio journal or creating a podcast.

(3) We will practice listening and empathizing with our *inner-terrestrial*: what the unknown Universe (God) is saying in us and through us.

**Evaluation:**

(1) We will reflect upon our journey since the start of the project to identify psycho-spiritual changes and consistent patterns within our Self.

(2) We will reflect upon the spiritual influence we have had on others around us.

# APPENDICES

# Aaron C. Waldron

A Shaman in Journey – A Theopoet

**BORN**
March 15, 1987
Life Path #: 7
Zodiac: Pisces
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Taurus

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| English, Slang | Master of Divinity | Meta-Spirituality \| Liberation \| Animism<br>Urban-Shamanism \| Buddhism \| Mysticism |

**About Aaron C. Waldron**

My name is Aaron Christopher Michael Chengte (chan-tay) Waldron and we are a Shaman Pisces in a journey of discovering Self who was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. As a Path-maker, we aim to traverse uncharted inner-terrestrial terrain and undergo a process of deep spiritual, philosophical and theological dialogue that focuses on the idea that God is changing, as is the universe: a mutual immanence between God and creation. Therefore, our knowledge of God must be progressing as we learn more about God and we can never settle in any absolutes, therefore as a Shaman in Journey, we deny the absolutes of God's immutability and indescribable truth. We aim to co-create Between | Spaces that bridges religiously traumatized *millennials* with Self: a relational God found within a meta- spiritual community.

**Research Interest**

- What is Meta- Spirituality?
- What does God look like beyond religion?
- How can a Shaman journey with humans beyond religion?

# Aaron C. Waldron

A Shaman in Journey – A Theopoet

**BORN**
March 15, 1987
Life Path #: 7
Zodiac: Pisces
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Taurus

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| English, Slang | Master of Divinity | Meta-Spirituality \| Liberation \| Animism<br>Urban-Shamanism \| Buddhism \| Mysticism |

**Religious Trauma**

My Mother was a born-again Christian who believed that Jesus was the perfect example. However, our Mamá used Jesus and the Bible to punish as well as violently suppress a child of God. Kneeling on rice in the nude while we read stories of how Jesus is our Lord and Savior, our Redeemer. But all we could think of was how religion inflicted this pain we felt in our knees: the rice becoming a part of our flesh violently and forcefully; reminding me of what happens when you are indecent or weird. Christianity restricted me and prevented me from being authentically me in the eyes of God.

**Relationship with Mother Symbol/Archetype**

Our relationship with our mother symbol/archetype was neglectful and violently traumatizing. How we learned to develop trust in the world and in Self was reflective of our relationship with our mother. Our independence is from being neglected: left to survive without. How we developed early relationships with others reflects our broken relationship with our Mamá. We learned to love others from how our mother loved us.

# Aaron C. Waldron

A Shaman in Journey – A Theopoet

**BORN**
March 15, 1987
Life Path #: 7
Zodiac: Pisces
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Taurus

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| English, Slang | Master of Divinity | Meta-Spirituality \| Liberation \| Animism<br>Urban-Shamanism \| Buddhism \| Mysticism |

**God Beyond the Church**

God is experience: the space between one another that provides the necessary opportunity for something to happen or not happen. God is not one thing but is the very thing that is everything. My life is a relationship God is having with its-Self.

**Intersectionality of Self**

We are "Legion" for we are many found in one who reflects the many. We are an Artist, Hurt Child, Pisces, Advocate, Teacher, Partner, Brother, Mother, Father, Elder, Lifeforce, Bisexual, Liberation Theologian, Human, a Queen, Soldier, a PTSD survivor, Leader, Student and a Shaman in journey.

**A Living Symbol**

We symbolize "the Sheep turned Shepherd." We symbolize permission to go off path and make a new one.

# Yesenia Fernández

A Wounded Mother – A Theopoet

**BORN**
January 18, 1987
Life Path #: 8
Zodiac: Capricorn
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Cancer

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English | B.S. in Behavioral Science | Post-Christianity \| Catholicism \| Spirituality \| Animism<br>Mujerista \| Liberation |

**About Yesenia Fernandez**

My name is Yesenia Fernández and I am a Dominican Capricorn born and raised in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York. I have spent a great deal of my life being silently absent and not speaking up for myself. I was a "pleaser," who thought being extremely selfless made me a good person or it was what God demanded. I struggled to exist in the shadow that my mother casted when she would expect me to be perfectly silent. I am no longer imprisoned by these beliefs and experiences because I have started a journey of healing that requires me to transform into my better Self. I transform daily as I build a relationship with myself, especially my shadow. She has secrets and she reminds me of things I want to forget. I struggle daily to be a mother, Daughter, Partner, Artist and a Hurt Child. I am a Wounded Mother: because I choose to forgive my mother for what she did and did not do. I choose to not repeat the trauma done to me. I choose to Love those who fail to love themselves. This is what I call “Her Revolución.”

**Research Interest:**

- How does a Wounded Mother interpret the Bible?
- How can a Wounded Mother experience God beyond the Church?

# Yesenia Fernández

A Wounded Mother – A Theopoet

**BORN**
January 18, 1987
Life Path #: 8
Zodiac: Capricorn
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Cancer

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English | B.S. in Behavioral Science | Post-Christianity \| Catholicism \| Spirituality \| Animism<br>Muierista \| Liberation |

**Religious Trauma**

Yesenia once practiced Catholicism and her experience imprisoned her inner child in a dark unknown place within her Self. The Church enslaved her mind and body through her mother and father. Yesenia became aware of her psycho-spiritual traumas after leaving the Church and finding relatively safe community to heal and rejuvenate.

**Relationship with Mother Symbol/Archetype**

Yesenia's relationship with her Mother Symbol/Archetype is traumatizing. Her mother is stubborn and relentless to remain the same way. Yesenia yearns for her mother's approval and embrace (love). Yesenia struggles to love Self because she is waiting for her mother to love her first. However, Yesenia's willingness to try and her indescribable strength gives hope to her potential to love Self first before asking others to love her.

# Yesenia Fernández

A Wounded Mother – A Theopoet

**BORN**
January 18, 1987
Life Path #: 8
Zodiac: Capricorn
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Cancer

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English | B.S. in Behavioral Science | Post-Christianity \| Catholicism \| Spirituality \| Animism<br>Mujerista \| Liberation |

**God Beyond the Church**

Yesenia believes God is in everything and can be also found in Self. Within a Church context, Yesenia agrees with Nietzsche when he said, "God is dead." The idea of God that mankind has created and upheld within the four walls of the Church is dead.

**Intersectionality of Self**

A daughter, a sister, a mother, a partner, a friend and an artist.

**A Living Symbol**

"I am a wounded mother." -Yesenia Fernández

# Steven M. Diaz

An Alchemist- Sage

**BORN**
November 8, 1993
Life Path #: 4
Zodiac: Scorpio
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Leo

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English | | Post-Christianity \| Pentecostalism \| Spirituality \| Animism Liberation \| Mysticism |

**About Steven M. Diaz**

My name is Steven Marcus Calzado-Diaz and I am an Afro-Indigenous Taíno Scorpio born and raised in New York since 1993. My pronouns are he, him, they and them, so I seek to discover the ones in the many. Through a process of psycho-spiritual and alchemical change we must discover who it is that we individually are. That is when the bodhisattva must return to the greater cosmic community and fill in their portion of the divine mandala. As I now exist as an alchemist in a post-Christian (separation from the bureaucratic church and not to be confused with the working church) context, I contemplate the notions of Self in conversation through all religions, sciences, and philosophies. In utilizing the many Images of God as the common ground of being amongst all existing things, I recognize that the essence of God is unknowable, but it is a penetrative experience that is mutually eminent for both the divine and the corporeal. – Steven M. Diaz

**Research Interest:**

- How does a Sage interpret biblical scripture?
- How can a Sage experience God beyond religion?
- How does dialogue change when out of religion?

# Steven M. Diaz

An Alchemist- Sage

**BORN**
November 8, 1993
Life Path #: 4
Zodiac: Scorpio
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Leo

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English | | Post-Christianity \| Pentecostalism \| Spirituality \| Animism Liberation \| Mvsticism |

**Religious Trauma**

Steven experienced a deliberate withholding of access within a Christian faith community. Steven experienced Gods "calling" and received no mentoring or support from the Church. Steven questions his own image through the understandings and critique of Christianity.

**Relationship with Mother Symbol/Archetype**

My relationship with my Mother Symbol/Archetype is a relatively healthy relationship. I am the first thing and more than likely the only thing she loves in this world. From early childhood I have been my mother's "secret box:" trusting and confiding in me her deepest secrets and fears. This would inevitably set the template for my relations with others. Being the only child, born under the last quarter moon of November, this makes me a Scorpio. As a Scorpio who has a Taurus mother, I experienced her as a devouring mother archetype. My mother loved me in a way that enabled her to be extremely restrictive with me. It's this parenting style birthed out of my mother's traumas. As much as I rebelled against her rules and forms of thinking, my subconscious absorbed it all as a representation for how I show up in space. It is fair to say my Scorpio persona boasts my mother's already devouring style of parenting. As to my penetrative personality to those I am close to. – Steven M. Diaz

# Steven M. Diaz

An Alchemist- Sage

**BORN**
November 8, 1993
Life Path #: 4
Zodiac: Scorpio
Moon: Virgo
Rising: Leo

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English | | Post-Christianity \| Pentecostalism \| Spirituality \| Animism Liberation \| Mysticism |

**God Beyond the Church**

Steven found relatively supportive community outside the Church and was mentored by others who separated from the Church. Steven describes his post-Church experience as "the Wilderness." As Steven journeys through the Wilderness, he is experiencing more access to love, community, information and God in Self.

**Intersectionality of Self**

"I am a bridge between people, a husband, a son, a brother, a theologian, a philosopher, a penetrative lovingly sensitive being." – Steven M. Diaz

**A Living Symbol**

"I symbolize community." – Steven M. Diaz

# Grizelle M. Diaz

A Taína Bruja- Healer – Art Therapist

**BORN**
November 16, 1992
Life Path #: 3
Zodiac: Scorpio
Moon: Leo
Rising: Virgo

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English, Taíno | Master of Art Therapy | Post-Christianity \| Pentecostalism \| Spirituality \| Taíno |

**About Grizelle M. Diaz**

My name is Grizelle M. Diaz and I am a Taína Scorpio born and raised in the Bronx, New York since 1992. Currently I am a practicing Art Therapist, newly married and developing my own private practice. I have been on a self-reflecting journey since the age of 12 years old; I realized I wanted to walk a spiritual path, it felt natural. Over the span of twelve years, I embraced my identity through race and ethnicity. I am a Puerto Rican woman with beige skin complexion, wavy hair, and who embraces a Latino Spanish language and culture.

**Research Interest:**

- How does a *Taína Bruja* interpret the Bible?
- How can a *Taína Bruja* experience God beyond the Church?
- How does a *Taína Bruja* seek healing beyond the Church?

# Grizelle M. Diaz

A Taína Bruja- Healer – Art Therapist

**BORN**
November 16, 1992
Life Path #: 3
Zodiac: Scorpio
Moon: Leo
Rising: Virgo

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English, Taíno | Master of Art Therapy | Post-Christianity \| Pentecostalism \| Spirituality \| Taíno |

**Religious Trauma**

A previously advent Pentecostal practitioner who experienced several traumas in the Church. Grizelle's family is heavily connected to the Church and because of this, she has not found refuge from the oppression within the four walls of a Church. Church dictated how Grizelle was supposed to worship and be a good Christian. She felt unauthentic and witnessed hypocritical use of power. After finding out her ancestry, Grizelle set out on a path of Self-discovery and re-establishing a relationship with a relative God.

**Relationship with Mother Symbol/Archetype**

Grizelle experienced her mother symbol as a psychological masculine and feminine role in her life. Her mother taught her love and safety but became overly protective when Grizelle reached puberty, and this caused Grizelle to feel restricted. Her mother was an anchor in the Church for her. Outside the Church Grizelle finds her mother symbol in her Self.

# Grizelle M. Diaz

A Taína Bruja- Healer – Art Therapist

**BORN**
November 16, 1992
Life Path #: 3
Zodiac: Scorpio
Moon: Leo
Rising: Virgo

| **Spoken Language:** | **Education:** | **Theology:** |
|---|---|---|
| Latin, English, Taíno | Master of Art Therapy | Post-Christianity \| Pentecostalism \| Spirituality \| Taíno |

**God Beyond the Church**

Grizelle believes God is in small communities. She came from a Christian practice of community that focused on a European Caucasian dominating male figure who represented God. "God wasn't personal but instead God was being prostituted by the Church." -Grizelle M. Diaz

**Intersectionality of Self**

A Daughter, Wife, Art Therapist, Artist, Healer, Sister, Friend, Leader, Child, God.

**A Living Symbol**

"I symbolize a Healer." -Grizelle M. Diaz

Appendix B: Budget, Timeline

# Between | Space Project Budget

## % of Income Spent

53%

## Summary

Total Monthly Income

$780

Total Monthly Expenses

$414

## Monthly Donations

| Item | Amount |
|---|---|
| Online Fundraiser | $500.00 |
| Project Merch | $80.00 |
| Community Subscriptions | $100.00 |
| Other Donations | $100.00 |

## One Time Donations

| Item | Amount |
|---|---|
| Anonymous Donation | $5,000.00 |

## Monthly Expenses

| Item | Amount |
|---|---|
| Adobe Suite (digital editing) | $60.00 |
| Website | $60.00 |
| Survey Monkey | $0.00 |
| Transistor (Podcast Broadcasting) | $99.00 |
| WiFi (Donated) | $0.00 |
| Apple TV subscription | $15.00 |
| Center for Applied Jungian Studies | $150.00 |
| Amazon Prime Subscription | $15.00 |
| Evernote Subscription | $15.00 |
| Phone (Donated) | $0.00 |
| Online Community platform | $100.00 |

## One-Time Expenses

| Item | Amount |
|---|---|
| Webinar/ Seminar Entrance fees | $3,000.00 |
| Microsoft Suite | $100.00 |
| Grammerly | $50.00 |
| Books (Research) | $2,000.00 |
| Hardware/ Technology | $2,500.00 |
| Permits & Fees | $100.00 |
| Total One-Time Expenses | $7,750.00 |

# Between | Space

A Timeline of Events to Develop a Doctoral Project.

First Proposal Draft NLT November 2022.

Project Completion NLT March 2024.

| | Completed NLT | Bold words represent ideas & Sub-Projects |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ | Nov 28 2021 | A working **Challenge Statement** draft. |
| ☐ | Dec 30 2021 | Recruit **Site-Team** |
| ☐ | Jan 1 2021 | 1st Meeting with **Site-Team** |
| ☐ | Feb 15 2022 | 1st draft of **Chapter One** |
| ☐ | Feb 15 2022 | **Creating Research** Questions |
| ☐ | Mar 31 2022 | 1st draft of **Chapter Two.** |
| ☐ | May 10 2022 | 1st draft of **Chapter Three.** |
| ☐ | May 15 2022 | 1st draft of **Chapter Four.** |
| ☐ | May 15 2022 | 1st draft of **Chapter Five.** |
| ☐ | Jun 1 2022 | **Interviews & Surveys** Begin. |
| ☐ | Jun 1 2022 | **Start attending Trainings/Courses/Lectures/Seminars/Conferences.** |
| ☐ | Jul 15 2022 | **Begin Building Courses/Lectures/Spaces.** |
| ☐ | Nov 1 2022 | Final draft of **Proposal** |
| ☐ | Dec 1 2022 | **Research** is focused & Analyzed. |
| ☐ | Aug 01 2023 | **Research** is concluded & Analyzed. (8 months of research) |
| ☐ | Jan 01 2024 | 1st draft of **Dissertation** |
| ☐ | Mar 15 2024 | Final draft of **Dissertation** |

Appendix C: Definitions

**Agapē Love:** (Ancient Greek ἀγάπη, agapē) is a Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God."

**A Living Symbol:** A truly living symbol compels unconscious participation, and has a life-giving, and life-enhancing effect. - [Jung's definition of symbol] A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible expression of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented, is symbolic… So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way. (Griffin, David Ray. Archetypal Process (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 78.)

**Altruism:** An approach that suggests that actions are moral if their primary purpose is to promote the best interests of others. (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 427.)

**A Relational God:** A God that exist in the past, present, and future: an eternal God; a process of relevant, restorative, and revolutionary relationship anchored in the present.

**Authentic Leadership:** It focuses on whether leadership is genuine and "real."-authentic leadership is about authenticity of leaders and their leadership. -authentic leadership can be defined from a developmental perspective-authentic leadership as something that can be nurtured in a leader, rather than as a fixed trait. Authentic leadership develops in people over a lifetime and can be triggered by critical life events, such as a severe illness or a new career. [Trauma] (Northouse, Peter Guy. Leadership: Theory and Practice (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 221-222.) Fred O. Walumbwa defines authentic leadership as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Walumbwa, Fred O., Bruce J. Avolio, William L. Gardner, Tara S. Wernsing, and Suzanne J. Peterson. "Authentic Leadership: Development and Validation of a Theory-Based Measure." Journal of Management 34, no. 1 (2007). 94.)

**Axiom:** Do less, more thoroughly.

**Between | Space:** [a meta-quantum psycho-spiritual space] A space that attempts to reveal the wholeness of a human.

**Black:** an experience that has a person exist in a system of racism, a life of humiliation and suffering. Blackness symbolizes oppression and liberation in any society. (James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 12.)

**Carib:** A family of humans who inhabit the Caribbean or poses ancestry in the Caribbean.

**Caucasian:** A family of humans who inhabited the Caucasus Mountains between the continents of Asia and Europe or poses ancestry who originate from Caucasus Mountains.

**Church:** [a symbol] A symbolic body of practitioners who believe to be following Christ. As a Christian, Church doctrine is believed to be Gods absolute command and words.

**Colonization:** The act of establishing political, physical, spiritual and mental control over another conscious being or a group of conscious beings (culture).

**Colonizer:** [a thinking pattern] A community of humans who desire to control and conquer other humans. An effect of an ancient trauma that is perpetuated by illusions of power and absolute safety.

**Community:** An interconnected relational network of humans who are governed by a phenomenon described as God or Creator.

**Conceptual Reversion:** The mental grasping of eternal objects that are not yet physically realized in the temporal world, but which are proximately relevant to, and hence compatible for synthesis with, those that are already physically realized. "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution. It is, strictly speaking, a real factor in scientific research. (Oleg Komlik, Albert Einstein on the Power of Ideas and Imagination in Science, Economic Sociology and Political Economy, July 31, 2019, https://economicsociology.org/2016/01/08/albert-einstein-on-the-power-of-ideas-and-imagination-in-science/.)

**Consciousness:** A relationship between a series of patterns of thinking. An inter-dimensional community of thoughts and emotions.

**Courage:** the ability to articulate one's position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful

dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.

**Creation:** *God created (called into being), all things out of nothing.* This creative act on the part of God was absolutely free, and for infinitely wise reasons. The cause of all things exists only because of the will of God.

**Ecclesia:** A community of conscious beings who are governed by God.

**Egyptian:** A family of humans who inhabit the Egyptian land of Africa or poses ancestry from there.

**Empathy:** Emotion researchers generally define empathy as the ability to sense other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. ... "Cognitive empathy," sometimes called "perspective taking," refers to our ability to identify and understand other people's emotions. -of, relating to, or characterized by empathy, the psychological identification with the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of others.
what is empathy? It's the ability to attempt to understand another consciousnesses feelings, perspectives, and understanding [Theology]. That makes it different from kindness or pity. Empathy is about discovering other through *Self.*

**Energy:** [physics] the capacity for doing work. It may exist in potential, kinetic, thermal, electrical, chemical, nuclear, or other various forms. There are, moreover, heat and work—i.e., energy in the process of transfer from one body to another. $E = mc^2$ is a scientific symbol that expresses how energy is created. Mass (M) symbolizes movement or action, while the speed of Light (C) symbolizes Divine thought or ideals. (Einstein, Albert, and Robert W. Lawson. *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001.) The energy produced from this alchemy symbolizes *potential change, imagination* or *experience*. When action merges with ideals, we witness experience; the manifestation of the Original Source (God) within time.

**Epistemological:** The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.

**Ethics:** The word ethics has its roots in the Greek word ethos, which translates to "customs," "conduct," or "character." Ethics is concerned with the kinds of values and morals an individual or a society finds desirable or appropriate. (Northouse, Peter Guy. *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 423.)

**Glass Ceiling:** The invisible barrier preventing women from ascending into elite leadership positions. (Northouse, Peter Guy. *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 395.)

**Gnosticism:** Gnosticism taught that salvation is achieved through *hidden knowledge (gnosis).* This knowledge usually dealt with the individual's relationship to the transcendent being (God). It denies the incarnation of God as the Son. Gnostic doctrine teaches that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that the Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

**God:** The indescribable phenomenon connecting everything to one another. A vast spiritual quantum ocean that houses any and all possibilities.

**Hopefulness:** The receptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.

**Humility:** The capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments. Thesis is not created in isolation but takes into account feedback and correction from other sources of informed judgment. [p.48]

**Imagination**: Imagination (Whitehead) - (*Conceptual Reversion*)-To think otherwise than the fact (presented evidence)- to think freely- free thought.

**Imago Dei:** Latin for *image of God*, a theological doctrine common to Jews, Christians, and Muslims that denotes humankind's relation to God on the one hand and all other living creatures on the other. denotes the symbolical relation between God and humanity. the metaphysical expression, associated uniquely to humans, which signifies the symbolical connection between God and humanity. The phrase has its origins in Genesis 1:27, wherein \"God created man(humanity) in his(its) own image.

**Immanence:** The divine encompasses or is manifested in the material world. The immanence of God refers to God's relationship to the world – that God actively operates within it, sustains it as its effective cause, and is continually present (i.e., omnipresent).

**Indecent:** A process founded on opposite grounds- An Indecent Theology will always come from the margins of imprecision, and mismatches. (Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London U.K.: Routledge, 2010), 64.)

**Indecent Theologian:** A theologian in opposition of absolute or status que beliefs of God.

**Information:** Life source. Power. The Essence of Creation.

**Liberation:** The act or process of freeing a being from the control and or enslavement of *absolute* power.

**Light:** Organic chaotic information that is also an energy source. Light is a kind of wave that carries energy from one space to another space. Light can move throughout empty space (unlike sound waves). Light waves are made of a mixture of electricity and magnetism, so they are called electromagnetic waves. Light moves about 186,000 miles (300,000kilometers) per second. This means a beam of light could go 7 ½ times around the world in one second.

**Meta:** A prefix meaning "transcending."

**Metamodernism:** A structure of feeling that emerges from and reacts to the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism. (Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen, eds., *Metamodernism - Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism.* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 5.)

**Meta-Spirituality:** An emotionally intelligent & inclusive consciousness (a way of thinking & being) that is between religion and spirituality emerging from a 21st century "meaning crisis:" millennials migrating from religion in the U.S. [Personal Definition] We believe that we embody meta-spirituality in three ways: [1] the Journeying of an unfollowable path, [2] a relatively authentic connection with an inner Source (God) and [3] the exploration of Self in community with others Journeying towards Self. We embody an ever expanding and inclusive relationship between Self and an eternally unchanging Source of Vibration (God).

**Metaxy:** Plato uses metaxy in Symposium to describe a sense of in-betweenness. Socrates asks his teacher Diotima; is he mortal? No, Diotima replies he is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean (metaxy) between the two. An intermediate (metaxy) between the divine and mortal. (Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen, eds., *Metamodernism - Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism.* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 10.)

**Mutual Immanence:** We are affected by God just as much as God is affected by *us* in the past, present, and future. (Alfred North Whitehead, et al., *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 348.) God, and the world also remain *mutually transcendent* such that any world happening owes it to its existence its *own* actualization as its own decision of unification of its relationality. (Andrew M Davis, *Mind, Value, and Cosmos. On the Relational Nature of Ultimacy* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publ, 2021), 199.)

**Nubian:** A family of humans who inhabit the Nubian land of Africa or poses ancestry from Africa.

**Olmec:** A family of humans who inhabit the North & South America continents during a specific time of pottery or poses ancestry from this region and time period.

**Ontological:** relating to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.

**Openness:** the desire to engage in open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality patience and love.

**Oppressed Consciousness:** A pattern of thinking that is domesticated by the situation of oppression in which it finds itself. It is a consciousness which really became reflexive, unable to be subject, deprived of a sense of direction and of historical vocation. Dominated by reflexiveness, this consciousness could not speak. Unable to enter in critical dialogue with their environment, as a consequence of the relationship of domination which oppressed them, these societies became "mute." (Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (St. Meinrad, IN: Abby Press, 1972), 10.)

**Phenomenology:** The aim of Phenomenology is to clarify describe and make sense of the structures and dynamics of pre-reflective human experiences, were as hermeneutics aims to articulate the reflective character of the human experience as it manifests in languages and forms of creative signs. (Oxford Handbooks online Rene' Rosfort mar 2019)

**Power:** the capacity of some persons to produce intended, and foreseen effects on others. (Dennis Hume Wrong, *Power, Its Forms, Bases, and Uses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2.)

**Prayerfulness** – the making of space to commune with God. The tack of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God's sanctifying work.

**Prophetic Ministry:** The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. - to hold together criticism and energizing, for I should urge that either by itself is not faithful to our best tradition. (Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination* (Seoul: Scripture Union Press, 2017), 3-4.)

**Public|Space:** [Community, Ekklēsia, Church] The *Ekklēsia* are the called-out ones, a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into and convened into a public place for the purpose of deliberating and worship. (Anthony Daley, *The Ekklesia* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2012.), 35-36.)

**Queer:** Whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. (Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Trans/Formations* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 17.)

**Reconciliation:** The end of the estrangement, caused by choices perceived as evil, between God & humanity. John Calvin describes reconciliation as *the peace between humanity and God that results from the expiation of religious sin and the propitiation of God's wrath* - involves a change in the relationship between God and man or man and man. It assumes there has been a breakdown in the relationship, but now there has been a change from a state of enmity and fragmentation to one of harmony and fellowship.

**Relational Transparency:** Refers to being open and honest in presenting one's true self to others. -Relational transparency occurs when individuals share their core feeling, motives and inclinations with others in an appropriate manner. (Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022), 229.)

**Seeker:** A seeker is a human searching and journeying for Source.

**Self:** The archetypal Self, as we have noted, is not the center of the field of consciousness (i.e., it is not the ego), but is a deeper organizing principle to which ego-consciousness must become related. (C. Michael Smith, *Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 120.)

**Shadow:** The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period. C G Jung and Joseph Campbell, The Portable Jung (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 145.

**Shaman:** Mircea Eliade defines a Shaman as "*a magician,* and *medicine man;* he/she is believed to cure, like all doctors, and to perform miracles of the fakir type, like all magicians, whether primitive or modern.*" [a technician of Spirit]* (Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. 4.) Don Jose Ruiz a Toltec Shaman from Southern Central Mexico defines a Shaman as a "*nagual,"* meaning the awakened ones, in Nahuatl language. -Nagual or Shaman symbolize "the life force energy, the divinity that we all have inside of us-the Shamans are the ones whose eyes are open to this realization. A Shaman can be anyone who has experienced an *inner awakening* causing their *third eye* (spiritual eye) to open and see their relationship with Creation in a different way: realizing that the original *Source*/God is *Us* (God within). (Ruiz, Jose. *Wisdom of the Shamans: What the Ancient Masters Can Teach Us about Love and Life*. San Antonio, TX: Hierophant Publishing, 2019. XII.) The Shaman is a human being who is able to communicate with the dead, demons, and nature spirits, [energy] without thereby becoming their instrument. [vessel] (Smith, C. Michael. *Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul, Retrieving the Sacred* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 12.)

**Space:** A multi-dimensional shape of information in and out of infinite durations and periods of time. [a four-dimensional world] A four-dimensional shape of information confined by durations and periods of time. A relational exchange of energy. A collaborative exchange of energy that creates a traumatic experience with God: everything.

**Spirit:** Life giving, and death evoking energy. [evoke: bring or recall to the conscious mind. (present)] Energy.

**Symbolism:** Symbolism is no mere idle fancy or corrupt degeneration; it is inherent in the very texture of human life. Language itself is a symbolism." (Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect)

**Theology:** The first half of *theology* is theo-, which means God in Greek. The suffix -ology means *the study of*, so theology literally means *the study of God*, we usually expand it to mean the study of religious faith, practice, and the study of God's relation to the world.

**Theopoetics:** Theopoetics is a hermeneutical framework that is liberating by nature and aims to bring into relationship the embodiment and the numinous (Sacredness/Divinity) within poetry. We imagine Theopoetics as a poetically theological and spiritual method of empathizing, communicating and relating to an indescribable God. A relatively sacred (numinous) language that intimately brings pieces of poetic analysis, theology, mythology, spirituality and meta-modernity together momentarily to attempt to describe the indescribable. The combining of the two Greek words: *theo* (θεό) and *poiein* (ποίησις) creates a symbol, expression and way of life that means: *to make or shape relating to God or deities.*

**Theofilm:** A Theopoetic interpretation of film. A hermeneutical framework that connects Theopoetics, personal myths and moving poetic images in film.

**Tíano:** A family of humans who inhabit the Caribbean or poses ancestry from the Caribbean.

**Transcendence:** A theological term that, when referring to the Christian's perspective of God, states that *God is outside of the universe and is independent of it* and its properties. God is *other*, independent and different from God's creations, beyond it and not limited by creation or to creation.

**Transformational Leadership:** is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards and long-term goals. It includes accessing followers to accomplish more that what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership. (Northouse, Peter Guy. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2022. 185.)

**Wounded Mother:** A "Wounded Healer" (M., Nouwen Henri J. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York, NY: Image Doubleday, 2010. 88.) Those who claim liberation are called not only to care for their own wounds, and the wounds of others, but also to make their wounds into a major source of healing power.) with a focus on the inner feminine being the primarily wounded symbol. A *Wounded Mother* is a genderless symbol that identifies as a damaged Mother Archetype or inner feminine symbol: "The great Mother archetype, the psychic prototype of the maternal element living in the human psyche."(Neumann, Erich. The Fear of the Feminine and Other Essays on Feminine Psychology. Princeton University Press, 1994. 5.) A *Wounded Mother* is a human on a journey of Self-healing: the inner recovery of a mother symbol. To acknowledge your-Self as a wounded mother is to identify the neglected feminine within, nurture the unnurtured, love those who do not love themselves, protect those who cannot protect themselves, and heals from an authentically vulnerable acceptance of their Self.

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# A Heroes Journey

**A Dialogue on how we experience a development of Self through a Heroes Journey.**

## Welcome to the Dialogue!

**Teacher:** Aaron C. Waldron, M.Div. **E-mail:** ashamaninjourney@gmail.com

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays from 6 pm to 9 pm.

## Dialogue Topic

This dialogue will focus on the Heroes Journey and the development of the *Self*. The late psychiatrist & psychoanalyst, Carl Jung defined the Self as *the totality of a person's being*, and the word is capitalized to denote its centrality and sacredness. Jung believed that the *Self* is the *central force guiding our development: he understood this energy expressed in our ability to change form and evolve, while maintaining our personal identity*, and as *the blueprint of our potential unfolding and the path to greater unity of the conscious and unconscious in us.* We will psychoanalyze the film, "The Matrix" to explore: what is a Heroes Journey? What are archetypes? What is a personal myth? How does The Matrix film help us in the development and understanding of our Self through a Heroes Journey? We will be performing an act of Sankofa throughout this dialogue. Sankofa is a word often used among African indigenous people that symbolizes retrieving *something* from our past and bringing it forward into our present, so that we can use that *past-thing* to create an unimagined future.

# Dialogue Competencies

*Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:*

- **Demonstrate knowledge of a Heroes Journey, the Self and the collective unconscious.**
- **Explain their own personal myth or Heroes Journey.**
- **Formulate your own personal myth based on a deeper understanding of Self.**

*This will be assessed by:*

- **Weekly dialogues**

  **Final Project**

# Final Project

***A Poetic or Dramatic Expression***

An expression that uses poetry or a dramatic (theater) expression. You can write a poem that articulates a Heroes Journey. You can act out a scene from cinematic history that articulates a Heroes Journey.

***An Autobiography Expression***

An expression that uses your life's experiences to articulate a Heroes Journey.

***An Artistic Expression***

An expression that uses an artistic method to articulate a Heroes Journey. You can sing, paint, draw, take a photo or a series of photos; let your imagination guide you.

# A 3 Week Dialogue

This dialogue will be stretched and analyzed over a three-week period. We will meet once a week on Saturdays for one hour. In between classes you will be expected to review offered readings, collaborate with peers in dialogue and develop your final project.

*Week ONE*

A dialogue focused on the analysis of a Heroes Journey. What can a Heroes Journey look like in film? Why is a Heroes Journey vital to their development? Does a Heroes Journey require faith? What are archetypes?

*Week TWO*

A dialogue focused on learning more about the development of Self within a Heroes Journey. Can you relate to the main Character in the selected films? Is there a time in your life when you experienced a Heroes Journey? Can you identify the different archetypes found in a Heroes Journey?

*Week THREE*

A dialogue focused on what happens when we get unexpected results versus expected results within a process of a Heroes Journey. How much control do we have over our own Heroes Journey? How often do we allow the magician archetype (wisdom) to guide us through a Heroes Journey?

# A Heroes Journey

**A Dialogue on how we experience a development of Self through a Heroes Journey.**

## Dialogue Material

*Film(s):*

- The Matrix (1999)
- UP (2009)
- The Lion King (1994)

*A Shamans Notes (pdf)*

# The Matrix (1999)

*Film Notes: "a Heroes Journey"*

**The ordinary world.**

Thomas Anderson is a bored computer programmer by day and the hacker "Neo" by night.

**The call to adventure.**

Neo receives a message promising him that everything is not as it seems. He is told to "follow the white rabbit".

**Refusal of the call.**

Neo isn't sure if Trinity is telling him the truth. He allows himself to be captured.

**Mentor.**

Morpheus gives Neo a choice: the blue pill if he wants to return to his old life, or the red pill, if he wants to know the truth.

**Crossing the threshold.**

Neo chooses the red pill and is shown what the Matrix is.

**The ordeal.**

Neo struggles to accept his new role but ultimately learns to become who he was meant to be, defeating Agent Smith inside the Matrix and saving Morpheus.

**The return.**

Neo tells the machines he will defeat them and save humanity.

# A Heroes Journey

**A Dialogue on how we experience a development of Self through a Heroes Journey.**

## UP (2009)

*Film Notes:* *"a Heroes Journey"*

**Ordinary World**

Before his quest, Carl's just your average, everyday hermit. Retired and widowed, he lives alone and spends his days inside his house, watching TV with the shades drawn and waiting for the mail to arrive. He's lonely and stuck in a disgruntled, antisocial rut.

**Call To Adventure**

Carl's initial call to action comes in the form of the construction project going on all around his house. The head of the construction company wants Carl to move, which would mean leaving his house, which is essentially a shrine to his late wife, Ellie, and trying something new.

**Refusal Of The Call**

Carl repeatedly clashes with the construction company and tells them they can have his house...when he's dead.

**Meeting The Mentor**

Russell shows up on Carl's front porch, wanting to help Carl with just about anything in order to earn his Assisting the Elderly badge. Carl doesn't know it yet, but young Russell's going to rock his world—you know, once he finishes the snipe hunt Carl sends him on just to get the bubbly kid out of his hair.

**Crossing The Threshold**

Faced with the prospect of moving to Shady Oaks, Carl outfits his house with millions of helium balloons and takes to the sky, setting his journey in motion. Once he and his home lift off, there's no turning back.

**Tests, Allies, Enemies**

Carl's first challenge is dealing with Russell, who accidentally stows away onboard Carl's floating abode. Carl begrudgingly accepts him as an ally, and then the unlikely duo faces its first real test: piloting Carl's house through a wicked thunderstorm.

# UP (2009)

*Film Notes:* *"a Heroes Journey"*

[continued] Once they land in South America, their quest for Paradise Falls is loaded with even more obstacles and enemies. For starters, they have to drag Carl's house to Paradise Falls before its balloons are totally zapped of their helium. Along the way, they pick up two more allies that Carl initially views as enemies, or at least major pains in the butt: Kevin and Dug. Then there's Muntz's dog pack. There's no confusion about these conniving canines: they're enemies from the start, as they pursue, and ultimately capture, Carl and his crew.

### Approach To The Inmost Cave

After Muntz realizes that Carl and Russell are just an old man and a roly-poly kid, he invites them to dinner onboard his opulent airship as his guests. Carl quickly recognizes that Muntz has gone bonkers and will stop at nothing to capture Kevin; he and Russell need to get out of there ASAP. The dog pack may have been dangerous, but their master, Muntz, is the real threat: not just to Carl's mission, but also to his life.

### Ordeal

When Carl, Russell, Dug, and Kevin run away from Muntz, the fallen explorer's dog pack is hot on their trail. Carl and his posse outrun the dogs, only to have Muntz himself track them down, capture Kevin, and set Carl's beloved house on fire. Still, Carl and Russell survive. Sometimes it pays not to be a giant, exotic bird.

### Reward (Seizing The Sword)

With Muntz out of his hair, Carl and his house finally reach Paradise Falls, but the victory is hollow. Muntz has Kevin in his clutches, and Russell feels Carl let them down. When Russell heads back to Muntz's airship on a solo mission to save Kevin, Carl has a change of heart, realizing that his real mission is to keep his new pals safe.

### The Road Back

Carl's road back is literally the road back into the mouth of Muntz's madness. It's the reverse of his initial call to adventure: back then, Carl drove Russell away by sending him on a snipe hunt. Now, Carl's actively pursuing Russell. He lugs all of his and Ellie's belongings out of the house so it's light enough to fly again, and takes off for Muntz's airship, his sights set on saving Russell.

# UP (2009)

*Film Notes:* *"a Heroes Journey"*

**Resurrection**

Carl is reborn as a geriatric action hero in his final, most dangerous battle with Muntz on Muntz's airship. Carl puts his life on the line to save his friends; if he fails, the consequences would be huge. Ultimately, he rescues Russell, Kevin, and Dug, and sends Muntz plunging to his death. Peace out, Chuck.

**Return With The Elixir**

Carl returns to the States a changed man. Most notably, he picks up a surrogate son—and a dog! More importantly, he breaks out of his rut. He recognizes that his whole life has been an adventure, learns that everything from trekking in the jungle to chowing down on ice cream is better with friends, and harnesses the awesome power of his own heart.

# The Lion King (1994)

*Film Notes:* *"a Heroes Journey"*

**Ordinary World.**

Simba is a little cub who gets to live in his ordinary world doing ordinary-world things. You know, just stuff like being a prince and using the entire African savanna as his playground. Super ordinary.

**Call to Adventure.**

Scar banishes Simba from the Pride Lands.

**Refusal of the Call.**

Instead of challenging Scar, Simba runs away with his tail between his legs. He lives for many peaceful and wondrous years in a jungle sanctuary with his friends, Timon and Pumbaa.

**Meeting the Mentor.**

Simba has a fateful conversation with the ghost of his father, who tells him fatherly things like "be responsible" and "seek revenge on your evil uncle."

**Crossing the Threshold.**

Simba returns to the Pride Lands.

**Tests, Allies, Enemies.**

Simba does battle with Scar's henchmen. Scar tries to deceive the other lions into thinking that Simba is a patricidal maniac, but Simba corrects that misconception quickly.

**Approach to the Inmost Cave.**

Simba and Scar circle each other, preparing for their final showdown. Simba tries to banish Scar from the Pride Lands, but Scar kicks some flaming embers into Simba's eyes, starting a fight.

**Ordeal.**

Simba fights Scar and wins, throwing his uncle into a pack of hungry hyenas.

Reward (Seizing the Sword). Simba climbs Pride Rock, his role as king restored.

# A Heroes Journey

**A Dialogue on how we experience a development of Self through a Heroes Journey.**

## The Lion King (1994)

*Film Notes:* *"a Heroes Journey"*

**The Road Back.**

The Pride Lands return to their normal lush and green state.

**Resurrection.**

Simba is accepted as the rightful king of the Pride Lands.

**Return with the Elixir.**

Simba and Nala welcome a son, the new prince, into the world.

# Dialogue Technology

**All students will need to have access to internet & a computer to take this course. Students can have difficulty accessing & using course materials and communicating with Professors if their equipment does not meet the following minimum standards.**

## MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

### SUPPORTED OPERATING SYSTEMS:

- Windows 10, Windows 8x, and Windows 7 are supported.
- Mac OS X 10.10 (Yosemite) and higher is supported

### PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS:

- Microsoft Office 2016 (Windows) or Microsoft Office 2016 (Mac).
- Google Suite for Education. This is provided for you free of charge. Once you receive your email, you will have access to Google's Suite of services

### MINIMUM SUPPORTED INTERNET BROWSERS:

Windows Users

- Microsoft Internet Explorer 11 and Edge 39 and 40 (Please make sure your operating system is also current)
- Google Chrome 59 and 60
- Mozilla Firefox 54 and 55

### Mac OS Users

- Apple Safari 9 and 10
- Google Chrome 59 and 60
- Mozilla Firefox 54 and 55

# A Heroes Journey

**A Dialogue on how we experience a development of Self through a Heroes Journey.**

## Dialogue Requirements

1. **Online Dialogue** (50% of the final grade)
   Your participation in the ongoing dialogue is a vital element in the methodology of this course. Each dialogue will be graded based on the dialogue rubric.

2. **A Final Project** (50% of the final grade)
   Create an artistic & creative expression of what you have learned throughout this series of dialogues. What has changed in you? Do you see your-Self differently? Has your religious position transformed or strengthened? How does this affect your leadership? The final project should invite those who are different to not only see you but empathize with you while critically engaging the offered readings and class dialogues.

Email your final project to ashamaninjourney@gmail.com. The last day of class each student will share their artistic expression with the rest of the class. The final project will be graded based on the dialogue rubric.

# A Heroes Journey

**A Dialogue on how we experience a development of Self through a Heroes Journey.**

## Dialogue Rubric

| | 30 | 25 | 15 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Articulation & Understanding of A Heroes Journey** | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a mastery of meanings & symbols found in a Heroes Journey. An excellent grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains a deep & expert level understanding of meanings & symbols found in a Heroes Journey. Shows a good grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains minimal engagement of the meanings & symbols found in a Heroes Journey. A weak grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains a lack of understanding of meanings & symbols found in a Heroes Journey, with a deficient grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. |
| **Context** | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a mastery ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates an expert ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates an inconsistent & insecure ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a lack of ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. |
| **Critical analysis & Connections** | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are clearly articulated, critically insightful; the arguments are persuasively supported by interfaith and interpretation of relevant sources (i.e., peer review journals, theological texts, and primary sources). | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are reflective & relative; the arguments are persuasively supported by interfaith and interpretation of relevant sources. | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are challenged, reflective of not understanding the material; the arguments are supported by monotheistic faith & interpretation of non-relevant sources. | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are stuck, reflective of not accepting the material; the arguments are supported by monotheistic faith & interpretation of the Bible. |

# Grading Scale

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 95-100% | 4.00 | A |
| 91-94% | 3.75 | A- |
| 87-90% | 3.25 | B+ |
| 83-86% | 3.00 | B |
| 80-82% | 2.75 | B- |
| 77-79% | 2.25 | C+ |
| 73-76% | 2.00 | C |
| 70-72% | 1.75 | C- |
| 63-69% | 1.00 | D |
| 62 and below | 0.00 | F |

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# Words in Dialogue

## Some Jungian terms & concepts that may come up in dialogue.

**Active imagination.** Method of assimilation of unconscious contents through their experimentation as fantasies in the wakeful state.

**Amplification.** Method of association in the dream interpretation consisting in collecting parallel materials drawn from mythology, religion, fairy tales, alchemy, astrology etc. -> See also free associations.

**Analytical psychology**. Derived from psychoanalysis, **a. p**. designates Carl Jung's contributions. (See also psychoanalysis.)

**Anima.** The archetype of female in male.

**Animus.** The archetype of male in female.

**Anthropos.** Primordial human, archetypal image of wholeness in alchemy, religion, and Gnostic philosophy. (See also wholeness.)

**Archetype.** Primary structural element of human psyche. The archetype is a predisposition for specific human experiences such as birth, motherhood, death, love etc. It is on the psychic level the correspondence of the pattern of behavior of biologists.

**Archetypal image.** The form or representation taken by the archetype in dreams, fantasies, cultural and religious (mythical) products. (See archetypes.)

**Assimilation.** The process of conscious integration of the contents of the personal and collective unconscious. The assimilation is the result of conscious elaboration (insight) in the psychotherapeutic process.

**Collective unconscious.** Distinctive from the personal unconscious, consists in archetypes or primordial images. (See also personal unconscious.)

**Compensation.** A natural process of maintaining a certain balance in the psyche. (See also homeostasis.)

**Completeness.** (See wholeness.)

# Words in Dialogue

**Complex.** An emotionally charged group of ideas or images. A fragmented personality unknown to the individual's ego-consciousness.

**Coniunctio.** Or "conjunction", term used in alchemy to define the union of opposites. From the Jungian's psychological point of view, it means the union of the conscious and unconscious, process that is also called individuation. (See also individuation.)

**Constellation.** Activation of a psychic personal complex or an archetypal content.

**Dream.** Spontaneous and natural manifestation of the psyche.

**Enantiodromia.** According to Jung, the path to individuation leads one to opposing sides within the psyche.

**Free associations.** Freudian method in dream interpretation consisting in asking the dreamer to provide his own ideas and memories related to the fragments of the dream. The method has been used by Jung himself and later on completed with his own amplification approach. (See also amplification.)

**Homeostasis.** Concept borrowed by Jung from the biology to define the compensatory function of human psyche that aims at the maintaining of a certain equilibrium in the psyche. (See also compensation.)

**Individuation.** Described by Jung as the process of synthesis of the Self which consists mainly of the union of the unconscious and the consciousness. (See also collective unconscious.) **A HEROES JOURNEY.**

**Inflation.** Following the identification with an archetypal image, the effect of this identification is to exaggerate the proportions of the Ego.

**Libido.** Tendency towards, lust, psychic energy. For Jung the libido is not only sexual, while Freud considers it is only sexual.

**Mandala.** Graphical representation of the center or the Self. (See also center & self.)

# Words in Dialogue

**Mystical participation.** Term taken from anthropology, it defines the process of identification of the human subject with external phenomena, objects or beings with the aim of taking over or determining specific effects.

**Neurosis.** Mental disorder characterized in particular by a temporary or permanent incapacity to adapt to certain requirements of the external or inner world (soul). Inhibitions, Phobias, Sexual Deficiencies, etc. Are some of the symptoms specific to neurosis.

**Numinous.** Defines the quality of archetypal images to inspire powerful feelings of panic, devotion etc.

**Persona.** Mask of the Ego, its social expression, the way the others see us.

**Personal unconscious.** The Freudian unconscious, made of repressed wishes, distinctive from the collective (archetypal) unconscious. (See also collective unconscious.)

**Philosophical stone.** Alchemist term identified by Jung with the process of individuation and accomplishment of the self. (See also Self.)

**Projection.** Autonomous process by which features (usually repressed) of the Ego are assigned to other people (external objects).

**Prospective aspect.** In the dream interpretation method, refers to the idea of dreams pointing to the future rather than to the past events (as with Sigmund Freud).

**Psychoanalysis.** The term designates several aspects: specific methods of investigation of the mind, a psychotherapeutic technique based on these methods and the sum of all the knowledge derived from the first two. Psychoanalysis was created by Sigmund Freud.

**Quaternity.** A visual representation of the psychic totality through square images.

# Words in Dialogue

**Repression.** In Sigmund Freud's view is a defensive mechanism that aims at rejecting the immoral unconscious representations trying to access the conscious mind. The repressed is the byproduct of the repression.

**Self.** The archetype of psychic Totality, according to Jung.

**Shadow.** Containing the repressed, "bad" parts of the individual personality, the *shadow* is the counterpart of the Freudian unconscious. There is also an archetypal *shadow* (personified by demons and Satan-like figures in mythology and religion).

**Symbol.** Unlike the Freudian definition, the symbol according to Jung is the unknown background of a psychic expression. Therefore, the symbol analysis is part of the Jungian approach of the unconscious.

**Synchronicity.** A meaningful, acausal, connection between two or more psychic and physical events.

**Teleology.** Jung's approach of teleology is based on his immense experience with his patients and dream analysis. He said he found psychic processes leading to a goal which is not influenced by outer causes. This goal is related to the archetypes and more especially to the realization of the Self or the psychic wholeness. (See also Self & wholeness.)

**Totality.** See wholeness.

**Transcendent function.** Arises from the meeting of the consciousness and the unconscious. It is a psychic process of transition from the stagnant attitude of the patient to a new and better one inspired by the constructive (symbolic) analysis of the unconscious contents that manifest in dreams. The psychotherapist mediates this process.

**Trickster.** Archetypal figure, embodiment of an undifferentiated consciousness of the primitive person coming from their identification with animals. It can be equated with the Shadow. (See also Shadow.)

# Words in Dialogue

**Unconscious.** The term refers to that part of the mind that is not directly accessible to consciousness. Psychoanalysis describes for the first time the contents of the unconscious and proposes exploration techniques. (See also personal and collective unconscious.)

**Wholeness.** Psychic stage in which the union of the unconscious with the consciousness has been achieved. It is the final aim of Jung's psychotherapy. (See also unconscious.)

**Wise Old Human.** Archetypal image that embodies the meaning. In the individuation process, the Wise Old Human embodies the collective unconscious or the Self. (See also individuation process.)

# "a Community"

**A Dialogue on the challenges of Self-discovery, identity, and interpersonal relationships in Community.**

# Welcome to the Dialogue!

**Teacher:** Aaron C. Waldron, M.Div.

**E-mail:** ashamaninjourney@gmail.com

**Office Hours:** Monday & Friday from 6 pm to 9 pm.

## Dialogue Topic

This dialogue will focus on the challenges of Self-discovery, identity, and interpersonal relationships in community. Can our differences be the corner stone to a diverse healthy community? What qualities and traits are needed to be a transformative leader in a diverse community beyond colonized or religiously traumatizing views and beliefs. These are just some of the many introspective questions we will explore as we begin to analyze the Disney film series, "Toy Story 1-4" (1995-2019). We believe this film series speaks to the many challenges, leadership qualities, benefits and complexities towards developing, maintaining and investing in Self while in community (a meta-spiritual community). We will be performing the act of Sankofa throughout this dialogue. Sankofa is a word often used among African indigenous people that symbolizes retrieving *something* from our past and bringing it forward into our present, so that we can use that *past-thing* to create an unimagined future.

# Dialogue Competencies

*Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:*

- **Demonstrate knowledge of a Community, the Self in contrast to the collective unconscious.**
- **Explain their own views, meanings and boundaries of a meta-spiritual Community.**
- **Formulate your own ideas and boundaries based on a deeper understanding of a meta-spiritual Community.**

*This will be assessed by:*

- **Weekly dialogues**

  **Final Project**

# Final Project

***A Poetic or Dramatic Expression***

An expression that uses poetry or a dramatic (theater) expression. You can write a poem that articulates a Heroes Journey. You can act out a scene from cinematic history that articulates a Community.

***An Autobiography Expression***

An expression that uses your life's experiences to articulate a Community.

***An Artistic Expression***

An expression that uses an artistic method to articulate a Community. You can sing, paint, draw, take a photo or a series of photos; let your imagination guide you.

# A 3 Week Dialogue

This dialogue will be stretched and analyzed over a three-week period. We will meet once a week on the assigned dates for one hour. In between classes you will be expected to review offered readings, collaborate with peers and develop your final project.

*Phase ONE*

A dialogue focused on the Theo-Film analysis of a meta-spiritual Community in the 21st Century. How do our differences affect a Community? How does personal development play a part in developing and maintaining Self while in a Community?

*Phase TWO*

A dialogue focused on learning more about the development of Self within a Community.

*Phase THREE*

A dialogue focused on not having control in a Community (Meta-Spiritual Community).

# Dialogue Material

*Film(s):*

- Toy Story (1995)
- Toy Story 2 (1999)
- Toy Story 3 (2010)
- Toy Story 4 (2019)

*A Shamans Notes (pdf)*

# Toy Story (1995)

*Film Notes:*

"Toy Story" is a 1995 animated film directed by John Lasseter and produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The film tells the story of a group of toys owned by a young boy named Andy, who come to life when he is not around. One of the main characters, Woody, is Andy's favorite toy and is threatened when a new toy, Buzz Lightyear, is introduced. Woody's jealousy and rivalry with Buzz drive much of the film's plot.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, "Toy Story" can be interpreted as a metaphor for a Community. The toys can be seen as representations of different members of a collective community, with Woody representing a community leader, Buzz representing new ideals and beliefs, and the other toys representing various aspects of a community. The question arises, **"how does a community leader continue to journey inward in community regardless of new or challenging changes?"**

The film's central conflict between Woody and Buzz can be seen as an example of the ongoing traumatic complications between traditionally normalized community leadership (Religiously Traumatizing community) and different ways (inspired by trauma) of doing things and thinking. Woody represents the part of the archetypical Self that is comfortable with one's own limitations and flaws, while Buzz represents the idealized version of the Self that one aspires to be. Woody's jealousy, inability to be vulnerable as well as the attempts to undermine Buzz can be seen as a defense mechanism (trauma response) against the threat that Buzz poses to Woody's own sense of Self-worth.

At the same time, Woody's fear of being replaced by Buzz can be seen as a manifestation of the fear of abandonment and loss that is common among community member's. Woody's attachment to Andy (archetypically God) and Wood's need for Andy's love and attention are also reflective of these same fears.

Towards the film's ending, Woody and Buzz come to accept each other and work together to save themselves and their fellow toys (community). This can be seen as a metaphor for the integration of different parts of the Self in community. In the end, Woody and Buzz realize that they are both valuable and important to Andy (God) and that they can work together to achieve their goals.

# Toy Story 2 (1999)

*Film Notes:*

"Toy Story 2" is a 1999 animated film directed by John Lasseter and produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The film continues the story of the toys from the first "Toy Story" film, with Woody and Buzz Lightyear once again at the center of the narrative. In "Toy Story 2," Woody is stolen by a toy collector and must come to terms with his identity as both a toy and a valuable collector's item.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, "Toy Story 2" can be seen as an exploration of identity & Self-worth. Woody's journey in the film can be interpreted as a metaphor for the human struggle to reconcile one's sense of self with the expectations of others while in community.

The film introduces a new character, Jessie, who becomes an important part of Woody's journey. Jessie represents Woody's unconscious desire to escape his life as a toy (community) and find a sense of purpose beyond being a loyal toy for Andy (an obedient and blind follower of God). Her song, "When She Loved Me," is a deep spiritual expression of the pain of rejection and abandonment that many people experience in their lives. This raises the question, **"how do we continue to journey inward beyond community?"**

Woody's struggle with his identity as a toy, a community leader and a collector's item can be seen as a manifestation of the human struggle to balance one's own desires with the demands of society and community. Woody's desire to return to Andy (God) and continue to be "a plaything for a child" can be seen as a reflection of the human need for connection and a sense of purpose beyond community.

At the same time, Woody's realization that Woody is valuable and important, regardless of their status as a collector's item, can be seen as a metaphor for the human need for Self-acceptance and Self-worth.

Overall, "Toy Story 2" can be interpreted as a complex exploration of identity, Self-worth, and the human need for connection and purpose beyond community. Through the symbols, characters and themes, the film offers a look at the challenges of Self-discovery and the struggle to find one's place beyond community.

# Toy Story 3 (2010)

*Film Notes:*

"Toy Story 3" is a 2010 animated film directed by Lee Unkrich and produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The film follows the toys from the first two "Toy Story" films as they face a new challenge: being donated to a daycare center as their owner, Andy, prepares to leave for college.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, "Toy Story 3" can be seen as a theopoetic exploration of attachment and separation anxiety. The film's central conflict revolves around the toys' (community/collective) fear of being abandoned and forgotten by Andy (God) as they move on to a new phase of their life.

The film's opening scene, in which Woody and the other toys imagine a scenario in which Andy (God) plays with (communes with them) them one last time, can be seen as a theopoetic expression of the toys' deep desire for connection and belonging. Similarly, the toys' desperate attempts to escape the daycare center and return to Andy (God) can be interpreted as a theopoetic expression of the human need for attachment and security.

The film's new characters, including Lotso the bear and their group of "lost" toys, can be seen as representations of different aspects of the Self. Lotso, with their charming exterior and manipulative personality, can be seen as a theopoetic expression of the human tendency to deny and repress negative emotions in order to maintain a façade of happiness and contentment. Lotso's group of "lost" toys can be seen as a theopoetic expression of the human fear of rejection and abandonment.

The film's climactic scene, in which the toys face almost certain destruction in a garbage incinerator, can be seen as a metaphor for the human struggle to accept the inevitability of change and the impermanence of all things. The toys' decision to hold hands and face their fate together can be seen as a manifestation of the human need for connection and support in times of crisis.

# Toy Story 4 (2019)

*Film Notes:*

"Toy Story 4" is a 2019 animated film directed by Josh Cooley and produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The film continues the story of the toys from the previous "Toy Story" films, with Woody and Buzz Lightyear once again at the center of the narrative. In "Toy Story 4," Woody reunites with Bo Peep and discovers a new purpose in life.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, "Toy Story 4" can be seen as a theopoetic exploration of identity and self-discovery. The film's central conflict revolves around Woody's struggle to reconcile their sense of Self with their desire to be useful and valuable to a child. Woody's journey can be interpreted as a metaphor for the human struggle to find meaning and purpose in life.

The film's new character, Forky, can be seen as a theopoetic expression of the human tendency to question one's own value and worth. Forky, who is made from a spork and a few other materials, initially sees themself as nothing more than trash. Woody's efforts to convince Forky that they are valuable and important can be seen as a metaphor for the human need for Self-acceptance and Self-worth.

Similarly, Woody's relationship with Bo Peep can be interpreted as a theopoetic expression of the human need for connection and support from the feminine. Bo Peep (Sophia-Spirit of Wisdom), who has spent years on her own, represents the experience (wisdom) and possibility of finding a new sense of purpose and belonging outside of traditional communities and their expectations.

The film's climactic scene, in which Woody must choose between staying with their old friends (old community) or pursuing a new path with Bo Peep (develop new community), can be seen as a theopoetic expression for the human struggle to balance one's own desires with the demands of society (other's). Woody's decision to pursue their own path, even at the cost of leaving behind their old life, can be interpreted as a theopoetic expression of the deeply Spiritual need for Self-discovery and growth.

Overall, "Toy Story 4" can be interpreted as a complex theopoetic expression of identity, Self-worth, and the human need for connection and purpose. Through its theopoetic symbols, characters and themes, the film offers a poignant and engaging look at the challenges of Self-discovery and the importance of embracing change and following one's own path in life, an unfollowable path.

# "a Community"

**A Dialogue on the challenges of Self-discovery, identity, and interpersonal relationships in Community.**

## Dialogue Rubric

| | 30 | 25 | 15 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Articulation & Understanding of A Community** | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a mastery of meanings & symbols found in a Community. An excellent grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains a deep & expert level understanding of meanings & symbols found in a Community. Shows a good grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains minimal engagement of the meanings & symbols found in a Community. A weak grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains a lack of understanding of meanings & symbols found in a Community, with a deficient grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. |
| **Context** | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a mastery ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates an expert ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates an inconsistent & insecure ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a lack of ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self reflective of the courses dialogue topic. |
| **Critical analysis & Connections** | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are clearly articulated, critically insightful; the arguments are persuasively supported by interfaith and interpretation of relevant sources (i.e., peer review journals, theological texts, and primary sources). | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are reflective & relative; the arguments are persuasively supported by interfaith and interpretation of relevant sources. | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are challenged, reflective of not understanding the material; the arguments are supported by monotheistic faith & interpretation of non-relevant sources. | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are stuck, reflective of not accepting the material; the arguments are dependent upon monotheistic faith & interpretation of the Bible. |

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# A Shadow of Self

**A Dialogue on the human psyche and the dark, unknown aspects of our Self.**

Between Film

# Welcome to the Dialogue!

**Teacher:** Aaron C. Waldron, M.Div.

**E-mail:** ashamaninjourney@gmail.com

**Office Hours:** Monday & Friday from 6 pm to 9 pm.

## Dialogue Topic

This dialogue will focus on revealing and understanding our Shadow. What is the Shadow and how can our Shadow be identified through the film, "The Joker?" The late psychiatrist & psychoanalyst, Carl Jung developed the concept of "the Shadow" as a part of his theory on the human psyche. According to Jung, the Shadow is a natural and universal aspect of the human psyche that is formed from repressed or suppressed emotions, desires, and experiences. These repressed contents of the psyche often originate from childhood experiences, cultural and societal influences, and personal experiences like religious trauma. We will be performing the act of Sankofa throughout this dialogue. Sankofa is a word often used among African indigenous people that symbolizes retrieving *something* from our past and bringing it forward into our present, so that we can use that *past-thing* to create an unimagined future.

# Dialogue Competencies

*Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:*

- **Demonstrate knowledge of the Shadow, the Self and the collective unconscious.**
- **Explain their own Shadow and or relationship with a Shadow of Self.**
- **Formulate your own understanding of the Shadow based on a deeper understanding of Self.**

*This will be assessed by:*

- **Weekly dialogues**

  **Final Project**

# Final Project

***A Poetic or Dramatic Expression***

An expression that uses poetry or a dramatic (theater) expression. You can write a poem that articulates a Shadow. You can act out a scene from cinematic history that articulates a Shadow of Self.

***An Autobiography Expression***

An expression that uses your life's experiences to articulate a Shadow of Self.

***An Artistic Expression***

An expression that uses an artistic method to articulate a Shadow of Self. You can sing, paint, draw, take a photo or a series of photos; let your imagination guide you.

# A Shadow of Self

**A Dialogue on the human psyche and the dark, unknown aspects of our Self.**

## A 3 Week Dialogue

This dialogue will be stretched and analyzed over a three-week period. We will meet once a week on the assigned dates for one hour. In between classes you will be expected to review offered readings, collaborate with peers and develop your final project.

*Phase ONE*

A dialogue focused on the film, "Joker" (2019) and its central conflict revolving around Arthur's struggle to cope with his shadow and the oppressive society around him. This theo-film study will analyze Arthur, and his descent into the unconscious Abyss and violence that can be interpreted as a theopoetic expression of the human psyche under extreme duress and or oppression.

*Phase TWO*

A dialogue focused on learning more about the relationship between the many Mask we create and our Shadow. The film's opening scene, in which Arthur applies clown makeup (a mask) while staring intently into a mirror, can be seen as a theopoetic expression for the human tendency to construct and perform identities in order to cope with the complexities of the Self. Arthur's clown makeup represents a mask that he puts on to hide his true Self, and his descent into the unconscious Abyss and violence can be seen as a result of his inability to reconcile his true Self with the expectations of society (an inability to identify Self).

*Phase THREE*

A dialogue focused on the process of synchronizing (healing) with our Shadow. Arthur's descent into the unconscious Abyss and use of violence allows us to look at the complex nature of the human psyche and the role of trauma (religious trauma) and oppression in shaping it and our Shadow.

# Dialogue Material

*Film(s):*

- Rambo: First Blood (1982)
- Joker (2019)

*A Shamans Notes (pdf)*

# Rambo: First Blood (1982)

*Film Notes:*

"Rambo: First Blood" is a 1982 action film directed by Ted Kotcheff and starring Sylvester Stallone as John Rambo, a former Green Beret who returns from the Vietnam War to find himself struggling to reintegrate into society. The film follows Rambo's journey as he becomes embroiled in a conflict with the local police, ultimately leading to a violent confrontation.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, "Rambo: First Blood" can be seen as an exploration of the psychological toll of war and the struggle to reintegrate into society after experiencing trauma. The film's central conflict revolves around Rambo's attempts to assert his independence and resist the control of the police, who represent a symbol of the oppressive society that he feels has abandoned him.

Rambo can be seen as a manifestation of the human psyche under extreme duress, particularly the psychological toll of war and trauma. His experience of being rejected and mistreated by society can be interpreted as a metaphor for the difficulty of reintegrating into society after experiencing trauma. Rambo's violent outbursts and his eventual transformation into a one-man army can be seen as a manifestation of the human tendency to lash out in response to extreme trauma and feelings of powerlessness.

The film's portrayal of Rambo as a lone warrior fighting against a corrupt and oppressive system can be interpreted as a metaphor for the human desire for autonomy and self-determination. Rambo's violent actions can be seen as a manifestation of the human need to assert control and agency in the face of perceived injustice and oppression.

Overall, "Rambo: First Blood" can be interpreted as a powerful exploration of the psychological toll of war and trauma, as well as the struggle to reintegrate into society after experiencing extreme duress. Through its portrayal of Rambo's violent outbursts and his resistance against an oppressive system, the film offers a compelling and thought-provoking look at the complexities of the human psyche and the role of trauma and oppression in shaping it.

# Joker (2019)

*Film Notes:*

"Joker" is a 2019 psychological thriller film directed by Todd Phillips and starring Joaquin Phoenix as the titular character. The film tells the story of Arthur Fleck, a failed stand-up comedian who becomes the Joker, a notorious criminal and anarchist in Gotham City.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, "Joker" can be seen as a theopoetic exploration of the human psyche and the dark, hidden aspects of our Self. The film's central conflict revolves around Arthur's struggle to cope with his shadow and the oppressive society around him. The film is a character study of Arthur, and his descent into the unconscious Abyss and violence can be interpreted as a theopoetic expression of the human psyche under extreme duress and or oppression.

The film's opening scene, in which Arthur applies clown makeup (a mask) while staring intently into a mirror, can be seen as a theopoetic expression for the human tendency to construct and perform identities in order to cope with the complexities of the Self. Arthur's clown makeup represents a mask that he puts on to hide his true Self, and his descent into the unconscious Abyss and violence can be seen as a result of his inability to reconcile his true Self with the expectations of society (an inability to identify Self).

The film's use of dark, oppressive imagery and its depiction of a corrupt and decaying Gotham City can be interpreted as a theopoetic expression for the human experience of trauma and the psycho-spiritual scars that result from it. Arthur's violent outbursts and his eventual transformation into the Joker (the Shadow archetype) can be seen as a theopoetic expression of the human tendency to lash out in response to extreme trauma and feelings of powerlessness (not being listen to or feeling seen).

Overall, "Joker" can be interpreted as a theopoetic exploration of the human psyche and the unconscious, often disturbing or unimaginable aspects of the Self. Through its portrayal of Arthur's descent into the unconscious Abyss and violence, the film offers a thought-provoking look at the complex nature of the human psyche and the role of trauma (religious trauma) and oppression in shaping it.

# A Shadow of Self

**A Dialogue on the human psyche and the dark, unknown aspects of our Self.**

## Dialogue Rubric

| | 30 | 25 | 15 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Articulation & Understanding of The Shadow Symbol** | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a mastery of understanding Shadow symbols & psycho-spiritual meanings discussed, an excellent grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains a deep & expert level of understanding Shadow symbols & psycho-spiritual meanings within dialogue, shows some good grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains minimal understanding of Shadow symbols & psycho-spiritual meanings within dialogue. A weak grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. | Your contribution to dialogue contains a lack of understanding Shadow symbols & psycho-spiritual meanings in dialogue. A deficient grasp of your intersectionality in relation to the dialogue. |
| **Context** | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a mastery ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self-reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates an expert ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self-reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates an inconsistent & insecure ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self-reflective of the courses dialogue topic. | Your contribution to dialogue demonstrates a lack of ability to contextualize psychology, spirituality & Self-reflective of the courses dialogue topic. |
| **Critical analysis & Connections** | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are clearly articulated, critically insightful; the arguments are persuasively supported by interfaith and interpretation of relevant sources (i.e., peer review journals, theological texts, and primary sources). | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are reflective & relative; the arguments are persuasively supported by interfaith and interpretation of relevant sources. | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are challenged, reflective of not understanding the material; the arguments are supported by monotheistic faith & interpretation of non-relevant sources. | Your contribution to dialogue proposes arguments that are stuck, reflective of not accepting the material; the arguments are supported by monotheistic faith & interpretation of the Bible. |

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Appendix C: Consent Form

# Human Research Consent Form

My name is **Aaron Christopher Michael Chengte (chan-tay) Waldron**; we are a religiously traumatized theopoet: a Shaman in journey. Our pronouns are *they*, *their* and *them*. We do not identify in the singular first-person pronoun (I), but instead, we identify as a collective third person pronoun (we). Throughout this dissertation project, we will use illeism to refer to our Self as *me, us, ours* and *we*. We are adjunct faculty and a doctoral student at New York Theological Seminary conducting theological research for religious trauma experienced among millennial's in Amerika. My phone number is **(920) 786-0237**. My email is: **acwaldron@mail.nyts.edu**

My project advisor is Rev. Rafael Reyes III, Ph.D. His email is: **rafaelr3@gmail.com**
Feel free to contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to study and create space for religiously traumatized millennial's in Amerika while studying at the New York Theological Seminary. We are trying to learn more about how and why so many have been religiously traumatized so that we may begin creating multi-faith/meta-spiritual spaces of community and healing as humanity moves further into the 21st century.

**Procedure:** If you consent to participating in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following ways: attend a "Safe | Space" once a month via zoom or in person; join our online community: "Public | Space." We also ask that you make the following commitments: to be interviewed, participate in surveys and questionnaires as well as courses. We will also make (an audiotape, videotape, written) recording of the sessions. After the project is completed, we will archive all audio and video tapes.

**Time required:** The project will begin on February 1st, 2023 and conclude October 31st,2023. You are being asked to commit to (see 8 month project calendar):

- 8 (once a month) x 1 hour long Safe | Space (listening space) Sessions via zoom.
- 3 x 3-week intensive Between | Film courses.
- 8 (once a month) x 45 min long Public | Space (similar to Church) via online.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still decline to participate in any of the sessions or answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You are completely free to withdraw from the study at any time.

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